Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit

RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA
ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Family Assistance

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

FATHERS INCORPORATED

This toolkit features information that is based on existing research and qualitative, anecdotal, and secondary data analysis related to field-informed practices. Inclusion of programs, tools, or practices does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance or the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.

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The first edition of the toolkit was published in 2013 as an online document and limited printed copies were also made available to the fatherhood field. Subsequent sections were added to the online version in 2015 and 2016. For this second edition, we have combined all the sections to produce a printable PDF document of the full toolkit. We have also updated links that had become out-of-date, updated the section on the Development of the Responsible Fatherhood Field, and added more recent references to some of the sections.

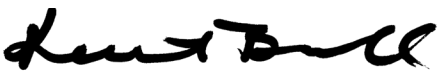
Note From the NRFC Director

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse is excited to present this valuable resource, *Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit: Resources From the Field,* to those of you who have been supporting fathers for years and those just beginning to develop responsible fatherhood programs.

Before launching a program, it is essential to identify and understand the specific needs of fathers in your community, foster solid partnerships, and determine the scope of services that your program will address. You can use this toolkit to learn directly from the experiences of others who have pioneered successful fatherhood initiatives. Building on the insights and lessons that they've shared, you can customize your approach to best serve fathers in your community.

We will continue to update this and other National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse resources, so please send any suggestions for future topics to **Help@FatherhoodGov.info**. And, in the meantime, continue to visit the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website **fatherhood.gov** for additional resources to enhance your endeavors.

Thank you for your support of fathers and, by extension, families and communities!



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Introduction

> **"Innovations in practice often begin at the practitioner level. It takes a number of years before research catches up with new practices and begins to document successes and failures. As a result, individual agencies can serve as informal laboratories for innovation."**
>
> **Bill Doherty,**
> **Professor, Department of Family Social Science and Director of the Citizen Professional Center, University of Minnesota[1]**

Research clearly indicates the benefits to children who have two actively engaged parents. Children who are supported emotionally and financially by their fathers tend to fare better than those without such support[2] and, whether living with or apart from their children, more engaged fathers help to foster a child's healthy physical, emotional, and social development.[3] However, despite wanting to be strong parents, providers, and partners, many fathers struggle to fulfill these roles.

Fatherhood programs provide services that support fathers in their roles as major influences in their children's lives. These programs aim to help fathers create loving, nurturing relationships with their children and be actively involved in their lives.

Although more research is still needed on long-term outcomes, evidence indicates that fatherhood programs can help fathers get past the barriers in their lives that may be holding them back from a better relationship with their children.[4] As research continues to focus on the role and impact of fatherhood programs, this is becoming clearer. For example, the Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation found positive evidence of improved father nurturing behavior, improved father engagement in age-appropriate activities with children, and increased lengths of time when fathers were continuously employed.[5]

Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit: Resources From the Field presents a compilation of resources that highlight the challenges and key issues associated with launching and sustaining a successful fatherhood program. This toolkit reflects the commitment of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) to improving outcomes for fathers, children, and families by providing strategic guidance to organizations that offer responsible fatherhood services.

[1] Personal communication, August 14, 2012.

[2] Avellar, S., Covington, R., Moore, Q., Patnaik, A., & Wu, A. (2019). *Parents and children together: Effects of four responsible fatherhood programs for low-income fathers.* Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/parents-and-children-together-effects-four-responsible-fatherhood-programs-low-income

[3] Cabrera, N., & Tamis-Lemonda, C. (2012). *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (2nd ed.). Routledge Academic.

[4] Bronte-Tinkew, J., Carrano, J., Allen, T., Bowie, L., Mbawa, K., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Elements of promising practice for fatherhood programs: Evidence-based research findings on programs for fathers.* National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/elements-promising-practice-fatherhood-programs-evidence-based-research-findings

[5] Sorensen, E. (2020). *What we learned from recent federal evaluations of programs serving disadvantaged noncustodial parents.* https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/what-we-learned-about-programs-serving-disadvantaged-noncustodial-parents; Holmes, E.K., Egginton, B. M., Hawkins, A. J., Robbins, N. L., & Shafer, K. (2018). *Do responsible fatherhood programs work? A comprehensive meta-analytic study.* Fatherhood Research and Practice Network. https://www.frpn.org/sites/default/files/FRPN_MetaAnalysis_Summary_121418_v3.pdf

The toolkit draws on existing OFA materials,[6] lessons learned by OFA grantees,[7] research studies,[8] publications and resources available on the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) website (fatherhood.gov), and lessons learned and resources used by fatherhood programs in diverse locales throughout the nation. The toolkit is also based on interviews, site visits, and informal conversations conducted by NRFC staff with experienced practitioners who discussed the challenges faced by fathers and strategies they use to support them.

> **"Responsible fathering means taking responsibility for a child's intellectual, emotional, and financial well-being. This requires being present in a child's life, actively contributing to a child's healthy development, sharing economic responsibilities, and cooperating with a child's mother in addressing the full range of a child's and family's needs."**
>
> **The White House[9]**

[6] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, & James Bell Associates. (2010). *Implementation resource guide for social service programs: An introduction to evidence-based programming.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/implementation-resource-guide-social-service-programs-introduction-evidence-based

[7] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, & James Bell Associates. (2009). *Emerging findings from the Office of Family Assistance healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grant programs: A review of select grantee profiles and promising results.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/emerging-findings-office-family-assistance-healthy-marriage-and-responsible

[8] Achatz, M., & MacAllum, C. (1994). *The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project: Report from the field.* Public/Private Vantures. https://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/the-young-unwed-fathers-pilot-project-report-from-the-field.html; Avellar, S. (2012). *Forging effective responsible fatherhood partnerships: A research to-practice brief.* National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/forging-effective-responsible-fatherhood-partnerships-research-practice-brief; Bronte-Tinkew, J., Carrano, J., Allen, T., Bowie, L., Mbawa, K., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Elements of promising practice for fatherhood programs: Evidence-based research findings on programs for fathers.* National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/elements-promising-practice-fatherhood-programs-evidence-based-research-findings; Martinson, K., & Nightingale, D. (2008, February). *Ten key findings from responsible fatherhood initiatives.* Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/research/publication/ten-key-findings-responsible-fatherhood-initiatives; Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers' fair share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/fathers-fair-share-helping-poor-men-manage-child-support-and-fatherhood; Sander, J. H., & Rosen, J. L. (1987). Teenage fathers: Working with the neglected partner in adolescent childbearing. *Family Planning Perspectives, 19*(3), 107-110.

[9] The White House. (2012). *Promoting responsible fatherhood* (p. 2). https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/promoting-responsible-fatherhood

About This Toolkit

This toolkit is a comprehensive resource for both new and experienced practitioners. It examines topics and issues such as:

Development of the responsible fatherhood field.

Building an effective fatherhood program.

- Effectively engaging fathers.
- Cultivating community partners for project success.
- Recruiting, retaining, and training staff.
- Serving fathers with specific barriers, such as recent incarceration.
- Promoting sustainability.

The toolkit covers these and other topics through:

- Tips and suggestions from experienced practitioners.
- Activities for use with fathers in one-to-one or group sessions.
- Tools from model programs and expert practitioners to use and share with fathers.
- Top takeaways and helpful resources.

The resources and activities detailed in this toolkit are available on the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website. Go to fatherhood.gov/toolkit to download the resources and activities.

Acknowledgments

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Development of the Responsible Fatherhood Field

> **"Clearly, there is a need to rethink public efforts on behalf of dependent and impoverished young families. These efforts—which include public assistance, child support enforcement, and employment and training policies and programs—require coordination at the national level and cooperation between the various agencies and actors at the local level."[10]**

With an emphasis on positive father involvement in the lives of children, the responsible fatherhood field dates back to at least the mid-1970s in the United States. At that time, more people were beginning to recognize that father absence had a substantial impact on child well-being.[11] Early efforts sought to support young, primarily low-income, fathers as they struggled with parenting and financial issues. The establishment of the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement in 1975, and labor market changes that led to a decline in wages for less-educated and low-income men, compounded the issues faced by many fathers.

Early Pioneers

One of the first community efforts was in Cleveland, Ohio. Fatherhood advocate Charles Ballard offered help to unmarried fathers through a hospital outreach program in the mid-1970s. In 1983, the Ford Foundation funded the Teen Father Collaboration (TFC), a two-year, eight-site national research project that showed agencies can recruit men for fatherhood programs, but only through aggressive outreach built on knowledge of and connections with the local community. This early project also showed that, contrary to stereotypes, teenage fathers do not neglect their parental responsibilities; in fact, they will participate in services designed to help them. Additionally, the project demonstrated that ambivalence at partnering agencies and lack of top administrative support rendered some programs ineffective.[12]

Progress in the 90s

In the early 1990s, with support from federal and private funders, Public/Private Ventures built on TFC's work through the six-site Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project. This project brought Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers to the field. The project confirmed that young fathers are more involved in the lives of their families than often assumed, and they will participate in a program to help themselves, depending on the approach taken and the services available.

[10] Achatz, M., & MacAllum, C. (1994). *The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project: Report from the field.* Public/Private Vantures. http://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/young_unwed_fathers_pilot_project_report_from_the_field_the

[11] Children's Defense Fund, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Clearinghouse. (1988). *What about the boys? Teenage pregnancy prevention strategies*. Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Clearinghouse.

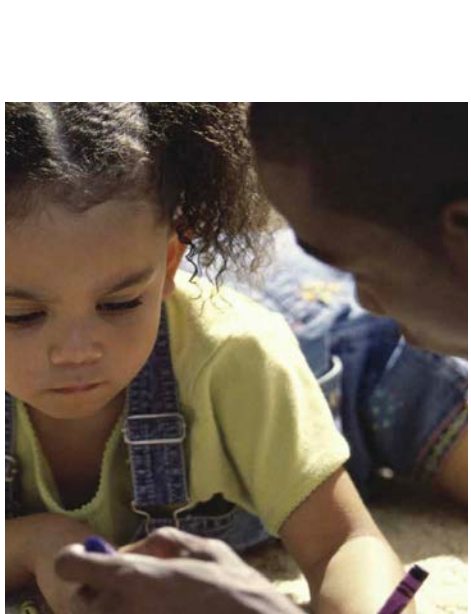
[12] Sander, J. H., & Rosen, J. L. (1987). Teenage fathers: Working with the neglected partner in adolescent childbearing. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 19(3), 107-110.

> **"We must work to change our culture to make possible the involvement of men in the lives of their children."**
>
> **Vice President Al Gore, 1994 Family Reunion Conference**

The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project also identified obstacles presented by:

- Complicated personal history of many young families.
- Organizational policies and attitudes that do not embrace father engagement.
- Failures of public policy and services to engage with fathers.

An early attempt to help low-income fathers pay child support was Parents' Fair Share (PFS), a national demonstration project conducted by MDRC, supported by federal and private funders, and authorized by the Family Support Act of 1988. A key goal of that law was to enforce more vigorously the child support obligations of noncustodial parents, most of them fathers. Recognizing that tougher enforcement would not work for fathers who could not pay, the law allowed some states to offer unemployed noncustodial parents the same employment and job training opportunities available to single parents on welfare.[13] Where the Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project had struggled to engage public employment and child support systems, Parents Fair Share was designed to actively engage these key sectors.



MDRC worked with Public/Private Ventures to modify the *Fatherhood Development* curriculum, making it applicable to fathers of various ages, adding sessions on employment, and decreasing emphasis on health and sexuality issues. Parents' Fair Share sites used the new curriculum in peer support groups that served as the "glue" to keep men engaged in services to help them manage child support payments, improve their employment status, and mediate issues with their children's mothers.

While Parents' Fair Share sites had difficulty improving the labor market performance of fathers who did not live with their children, modest gains were achieved for a subsample of the most disadvantaged men—those without a high school diploma/GED or with little work experience.[14] Parents' Fair Share confirmed that men will take part in peer support groups with other fathers to help fathers "recognize and begin to change behavior and attitudes that were counterproductive to their progress."[15]

[13] Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers' Fair Share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/fathers-fair-share-helping-poor-men-manage-child-support-and-fatherhood

[14] Mincy, R. (Presenter). (2012, April 26). *Achieving economic stability: Strategies for successfully connecting dads to jobs* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/achieving-economic-stability-strategies-successfully-connecting-dads-jobs

[15] Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers' Fair Share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood (p. 120).* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/fathers-fair-share-helping-poor-men-manage-child-support-and-fatherhood

Other national demonstration projects followed, including the Fragile Families Demonstration, Fathers at Work, and the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement's (OCSE) Responsible Fatherhood project. Fragile Families showed that child support agencies and fatherhood programs can work together. It also found that many young, unwed fathers are actively involved in the early lives of their children but tend to "drift away" as the challenges and stresses increase. The OCSE project demonstrated the value of partnerships in supporting dads' employment,[16] while Fathers at Work showed that traditional employment programs could work with fathers on parenting issues.

During the 1990s, the responsible fatherhood field benefited from the support of the private foundation community and attention from the federal government. The Ford, Danforth, Charles Stewart Mott, Annie E. Casey, and William and Flora Hewlett foundations were prominent supporters of fatherhood work. They worked together through a Funders Collaborative on Fathers and Families to support innovations in practice, advance understanding through research, and add more focus on fatherhood in policy arenas. The Ford Foundation, in particular, played a key role with a series of Partners for Fragile Families initiatives that saw the creation of new agencies such as the Center for Fathers, Families and Public Policy (now the Center for Family Policy and Practice), the National Center on Fathers and Families (to gather and organize relevant research), and the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF).

NPNFF grew out of a 1994 meeting organized by then-Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, who invited a group of practitioners and others engaged in fatherhood work to their annual Family Reunion Conference to emphasize the important role that fathers play in families. Following the meeting, and with the support of the Funders Collaborative on Fathers and Families, NPNFF was formed to encourage father involvement in fragile families and support communication among father-focused programs.

Additionally, President Clinton requested a 1995 review[17] of all federal departments and agencies to ensure an emphasis on fathers in all programs pertaining to children and families. The National Conference of State Legislatures produced a report on responsible fatherhood with suggested policy changes. Although not leading directly to new legislation, the Fathers Count Bill of 1999[18] set the stage for new federal initiatives in the decade that followed. At the same time, there was growing realization of the importance of Healthy Marriages and Relationships, a focus that was embraced by the Bush administration in the early 2000s.

> **"I am firm in my belief that the future of our Republic depends on strong families and that committed fathers are essential to those families."**
>
> **President Bill Clinton, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, 1995**

> **"Be the best father you can be to your children. Because nothing is more important."**
>
> **President Barack Obama, Commencement Address, Morehouse College, May 19, 2013**

[16] Mincy, R. (Presenter). (2012, April 26). *Achieving economic stability: Strategies for successfully connecting dads to jobs* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/achieving-economic-stability-strategies-successfully-connecting-dads-jobs

[17] Clinton, W. J. (1995, June 16). *White House memorandum supporting the role of fathers in families.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/npr/library/061695.htm

[18] May, R. (1999, November). *A summary of the "Children First Child Support Reform Act of 1999" and the "Fathers Count Act of 1999"* {Policy Brief}. Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/summary-children-first-child-support-reform-act-1999-and-fathers-count-act

Federal Commitment Expands: 2000s and 2010s

During the 2000s, the responsible fatherhood field expanded beyond its roots in employment and parenting services for low-income fathers to recognize the diverse needs of a wide array of fathers.[19] Programs began to include elements such as healthy marriage and co-parenting skills training, general fatherhood competency for all income levels, support for fathers involved with the child welfare and criminal justice systems, a focus on children's education and literacy, awareness of the needs of fathers who have children with special needs, and attention to issues of domestic violence.

This work was continued and expanded under the Obama administration. In 2010, President Obama asked that an interagency working group begin finding ways to encourage activities and policy developments that promote responsible fatherhood. From 2010 through 2016, this Responsible Fatherhood Working Group coordinated policy, programmatic activities, and engagement efforts on fatherhood across federal agencies.[20] Some of the federal initiatives impacting fatherhood that emerged from this work include:

- **Fatherhood Buzz.**[21] A Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) initiative, through the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, to reach out to dads with positive information through their barbers and barber shops.
- **Reconnecting Homeless Veterans with Their Children.**[22] This pilot initiative of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and DHHS, along with the American Bar Association, helped homeless veterans gain permanent housing, assisted them with child support obligations, and connected them with programs that offered employment and supportive services.
- **Transitional Jobs for Non-Custodial Parents.**[23] This Department of Labor grant program, which operated from 2011 to 2015, provided support for local efforts to prepare unemployed noncustodial parents for work through transitional employment, while assisting them to gain unsubsidized employment intended to promote family engagement and long-term self-sufficiency.
- **Building Assets for Fathers and Families.**[24] As part of a wider DHHS initiative to extend the benefits of financial education to individuals and families with young children, this Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) project provided seven three-year demonstration grants to encourage non-custodial parents to establish savings accounts and access other services to increase financial stability.

[19] Klempin, S., & Mincy, R. B. (2012). *Tossed on a sea of change: A status update on the responsible fatherhood field.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/tossed-sea-change-status-update-responsible-fatherhood-field

[20] The White House (2012). *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood.*

[21] http://fatherhood.gov/fatherhood-buzz

[22] https://www.fatherhood.gov/for-programs/program-design-planning/federal-agency-initiatives

[23] http://www.doleta.gov/reports/etjd.cfm

[24] https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/building-assets-fathers-and-families-baff-demonstration-grant

- **Fathers Supporting Breastfeeding.**[25] The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) developed educational messages to highlight the advantages of breastfeeding and how fathers can play a critical role in promoting the healthy development of their children and in strengthening family bonds. The resources (posters and brochures) are still available via the WIC website.

- **National Child Support Non-Custodial Parent Demonstration Projects.**[26] The Office of Child Support Enforcement provided five-year grants (2012 to 2017) to eight states to link non-custodial parents with employment services.

- **The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families,** has funded various research projects focused on the implementation and impact of fatherhood programs. Two projects that began in 2011 were the *Ex-Prisoner Reentry Strategies Study*, conducted by the Urban Institute to document the implementation of programs funded under the FY 2011 Community-Centered Responsible Fatherhood Ex-Prisoner Reentry Pilot Project grant announcement, and the *Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation*, a formative evaluation project conducted by Mathematica Policy Research to document and provide initial assessment of selected Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage grantees.[27]

Perhaps most importantly, federal initiatives authorized by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) and the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 (CRA) and administered through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (OFA) helped reenergize the responsible fatherhood field. Under the DRA, from 2006 to 2011, more than 90 organizations provided services for fathers in the areas of responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability. In the CRA funding cycle that started in October 2011, 55 organizations received four-year grants to serve fathers in those three focus areas, with increased emphasis on economic stability, and an additional five organizations received grants to work specifically with fathers returning to the community after incarceration.

In September 2015, OFA awarded 39 grants and five Responsible Fatherhood and Opportunities for Reentry and Mobility (ReFORM) grants for a five-year period from October 2015 through September 2020.[28] The federal commitment remained during the Trump Administration as OFA promoted the qualities of Fatherhood FIRE (Family-focused, Interconnected, Resilient, and Essential) through a National Summit in 2019 and, in 2020, funded 58 organizations across the United States to provide Responsible Fatherhood services until 2025.[29]

[25] https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/fathers-supporting-breastfeeding

[26] https://www.irp.wisc.edu/research/child-support/csped/

[27] For more information on the Re-Entry Study, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/ex-prisoner-reentry-strategies-study-2011-2017; and for more information on PACT, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/parents-and-children-together-pact-evaluation

[28] Tollestrup, J. (2018, May 1). *Fatherhood initiatives: Connecting fathers to their children.* Congressional Research Service. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL31025.pdf

[29] Office of Family Assistance (2020). Responsible Fatherhood FIRE grants 2020–2025. [Webpage]. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage/responsible-fatherhood

Recent Research

In addition to federal funding for program grants, there has been an increased focus on federal support for research projects since 2011. As noted earlier, OPRE funded the Ex-Prisoner Reentry Strategies Study (2011-2017)[30] and the *Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation* (2011-2020). OPRE also provided funding from 2013 to 2019 to support local research projects through the Fatherhood Research Partnership Network and, with funding from OFA, the Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) study (2014-2021). Whereas PACT looked at general program outcomes, B3 and other federally sponsored evaluations during this period examined services for specific targeted audiences of fathers, including the added impact of programming delivered in new and promising ways to help fathers with low incomes work toward economic stability and strengthen their relationships with their children.[31]

> **"Any fool can have a child; that doesn't make you a father. It's the courage to raise that child that makes you a father."**
>
> **– then-Senator Barack Obama, Apostolic Church of God, June 15, 2008**

As part of the federal learning agenda, a substantial proportion of 2015–2020 OFA grantees conducted evaluations of their own grantee-specific research questions. These evaluations are sometimes called "local evaluations." Some were descriptive in design, focusing on program implementation and participant outcomes; other evaluations were impact in design, studying the effectiveness of programs or portions of programs.[32] Findings from these evaluations included:

1. Recruiting fathers to meet enrollment goals often required substantial work and some programs had to broaden their recruitment strategies.
2. Most fathers reported that the program helped them become more effective parents, work better as coparents, and handle their bills better.
3. Fathers also reported that their contact with their children increased, and they engaged in more activities with their children, by the end of the program they had participated in.

More recently, the *Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence when Engaging Dads* (PAIVED) study (2017–2020), was designed to assess approaches that fatherhood programs can take to address and contribute to the prevention of Intimate Personal Violence (IPV) among fathers. The project produced a number of helpful resources, including:

1. Domestic Violence Prevention and Intervention in Fatherhood Programs
2. Ten Ways to Engage Fathers in Addressing and Preventing Domestic Violence

[30] Fontaine, J. et al. (2017, April). *Final implementation findings from the Responsible Fatherhood Reentry Projects.* Urban Institute. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/final-implementation-findings-responsible-fatherhood-reentry-projects

[31] Israel, D., Behrmann R., & Wulfsohn, S. (2017). *"Three innovative approaches to serving low-income fathers: The Building Bridges and Bonds Study."* (OPRE Report 2017-28). Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/B3_Practitioners_Brief.pdf

[32] Office of Family Assistance (2020). *Local evaluation final reports from 2015-2020 cohort of grantees.* https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage-responsible-fatherhood/data-reports; Avellar, S., Stanczyk, A., Aikens, N., Stange, M., & and Roemer, G. (2021). *Responsible fatherhood clients' change over time: Data snapshot of clients at program entry and exit.* https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/RF%202015%20outcomes%20508.pdf

Key Learnings From Recent Research Projects

- Making a change in key father outcomes is hard and takes intense, sustained interventions.
- Engaging mothers is challenging but it may be a key to realizing improvements in father engagement and coparenting outcomes.
- Explicit staff training on how to engage fathers and overcome challenges is associated with positive outcomes for participants.
- Training workers in human services agencies on father engagement strategies improves father participation, but the high worker turnover rates in some agencies presents serious challenges.

-Fagan & Pearson, 2021[33]

Lessons Learned

Numerous community initiatives have focused on fathers and their families. Programs have been developed as stand-alone initiatives or as part of larger organizations such as Head Start, family support, or community action agencies. While some have maintained services, many have struggled to sustain their efforts through the ups and downs of funding cycles. Those with the most longevity have had top administrators who support the program and actively advocate for continued funding options.

Successful programs have:

- Followed effective program models.
- Selected, trained, and supported staff based on proven principles.
- Allowed participants sufficient time to complete activities.
- Used incentives to engage fathers.
- Ensured programs are father-friendly.
- Selected outcomes with clear goals.
- Implemented methods appropriate for the populations served.
- Formed strong partnerships for recruitment and service delivery.[34]

These programs also learned that recruitment is an ongoing challenge for reasons that include:

- Program eligibility criteria.
- Fathers' lack of trust in operating agencies or fear of involvement with child support enforcement.
- Mismatches between program services and men's needs.
- Poorly designed recruitment procedures.
- Difficulty creating partnerships with other agencies.[35]

[33] Fagan, J. & Pearson, J. (Eds.). (2021). *New research on parenting programs for low-income fathers.* Routledge.

[34] Avellar, S. (2012). *Forging effective responsible fatherhood partnerships: A research-to-practice brief*. National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/forging-effective-responsible-fatherhood-partnerships-research-practice-brief; Bronte-Tinkew, J., Carrano, J., Allen, T., Bowie, L., Mbawa, K., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Elements of promising practice for fatherhood programs: Evidence-based research findings on programs for fathers.* National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/elements-promising-practice-fatherhood-programs-evidence-based-research-findings; Martinson, K., & Nightingale, D. (2008, February). *Ten key findings from responsible fatherhood initiatives*. Urban Institute. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/ten-key-findings-responsible-fatherhood-initiatives

[35] Ibid.

Looking Ahead

Over the past quarter century, funding for fatherhood programs has been inconsistent and financial sustainability remains a long-term challenge for fatherhood programs. However, one recent study has shown that there are state funds to support children, youth, and family services that could be leveraged in support of fatherhood programs.[36] The study points out that monetizing program outcomes and demonstrating the return on investment of a successful fatherhood program[37] can help convince state governments of the value of using funds available through funding sources such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Fatherhood programs have been evaluated to determine whether they improve fathers' relationships, parenting, and economic stability.[38] A lot has been learned, yet gaps remain. One area that needs more evaluation is the extent to which fatherhood programs are able to improve outcomes for the children of program participants. Research studies, such as PACT, have found some evidence that fatherhood programs are effective at improving the quality of father-child relationships, increasing fathers' in-person contact with their children, and helping fathers provide more financial support for their children. There are also some indications of improvements in fathers' social and emotional well being and coparenting relationships. However, the changes are often modest in size.[39] As a 2019 report concluded, "the evaluation of [fatherhood] programs is still in its infancy."[40] While continued investments in program evaluation and basic research are needed, the existing range of studies does provide a foundation on which to build. Let this be a motivating call to readers to continue to be curious and try new and innovative approaches with learning from fathers, practitioners, and researchers combined.

[36] Fagan, J. & Pearson, J. (Eds.). (2021). *New research on parenting programs for low-income fathers.* Routledge.

[37] Chase, R. A. (2019). *Potential monetary value of responsible fatherhood program outcomes for fathers and children: A framework for monetizing the future stream of two-generation benefits and avoided cost.* Fatherhood Research and Practice Network.

[38] Avellar, S., Dion, M. R.. Clarkwest, A., Zaveri, H., Asheer, S., Borradaile, K., Angus, M. H., Novak, T., Redline, J., & Zukiewicz, M. (2011). *Catalog of research: Programs for low-income fathers.* (OPRE Report Number 2011-20). Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/catalog-research-programs-low-income-fathers

[39] Fagan, J. & Pearson, J. (Eds.). (2021). *New research on parenting programs for low-income fathers.* Routledge.

[40] Adler-Baeder, F. et al. (2019, August). *Final evaluation report: Considering contextual factors on fatherhood program participants' experiences in Alabama.* Fatherhood Research & Practice Network. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/frpn-grantee-report-considering-contextual-influences-fatherhood-program

Careful planning before launch can help ensure the success and sustainability of any fatherhood program. It is important to identify needs, map community resources, foster solid partnerships, craft a thoughtful logic model, and determine the scope of services before the program ever opens its doors.

Start a Program

> **"There's a quote [from Charles Ballard] that stuck with me. 'Have no fear. This isn't easy. It's the hardest work you'll ever do. You can feel very, very lonely. But walk with great courage and confidence. Know [that] what you're doing will make a difference.'"**
>
> **Patricia Littlejohn,**
> **South Carolina**
> **Center for Fathers and Families**

This section presents planning and design steps that have been taken by successful practitioners (including needs assessment, community mapping, building and formalizing effective partnerships, and using logic models to guide the design of service delivery); staffing considerations (e.g., competencies, key roles, hiring, and training); and tips for fundraising, documentation, and sustainability.

Providing services to fathers is crucial, but does not have to mean starting a new initiative to serve men. Many fatherhood initiatives are part of larger organizations and include job training, social services, and family services. Others are small organizations focused only on fatherhood. Regardless of a program's scope, any fatherhood effort can succeed, even in challenging funding environments, when certain strategies are used effectively.

A fatherhood program can have many priorities including:

- Helping dads learn about positive parenting.
- Counseling men in their relationships with their children and their children's mother.
- Supporting men to become more self-sufficient in supporting their families.

Many fatherhood programs began as demonstration or grant-funded programs, some started as individual or grassroots efforts, and others embedded fatherhood into an existing organization. The first two approaches have produced some programs that still exist. The most successful programs typically are those embedded in successful organizations with effective leadership and the ability to cover part of the fatherhood budget through general funds. Those with the most success in "staying the course" also have senior administrators who support the program and actively advocate for continued funding and growth.

No matter how a fatherhood program is structured, the process of launching a new program is not easy. But lessons learned from

research and practice reveal five key elements that make the process easier and help ensure positive outcomes:

- Staff with a passion for the work who are effective, well trained, and well supported.
- A champion who believes in the program's potential, can overcome internal barriers, and has the authority to speak for the organization with community partners.
- Support from senior administrators.
- Effective community partnerships.
- Consistent documentation and evaluation focused on intended outcomes.

Planning and Design

Careful planning before launch can help ensure success and sustainability. Identifying needs, understanding the community, fostering solid partnerships, crafting a thoughtful logic model, and determining the scope of services are important design steps identified by successful practitioners. Well established community organizations may be able to complete the planning process in 2 to 3 months, but many organizations will need to devote 6 to 12 month or longer to this process.

Planning is an ongoing process. Successful programs monitor their performance and make necessary adjustments to services, staffing, and partnerships to ensure that participant needs and program goals are met.

Key questions for fatherhood program early planning include:

- What community needs should be addressed?
    - What will we do to directly address the needs?
    - What individuals or organizations in the community provide services that can help address these needs?
- What organizations are already serving fathers?
- Who can we partner with?
- What outcomes and benefits do we anticipate as a result of the program?
- What staffing do we need?
- What are the budget implications? How will we gain additional funding?
- How will we document and assess our efforts in order to make program modifications?

Spotlight on...

Individual Action

Joe Jones began working with fathers in Baltimore, MD, as a city health department social worker in 1993. With support from city government leaders, particularly the health commissioner, Jones built a fatherhood program as part of the department's Healthy Start program and eventually spun it off as an independent nonprofit organization. Now firmly established in the community as the Center for Urban Families, the program provides training and support in parenting, relationships, and employment. In addition to Jones's drive, passion, and organizational ability, the program's success has been built with skilled staff with long tenure, input and support from an active board, effective community partnerships, successful client outcomes, and local foundation support.

Powerful Partnerships

Marvin Charles and his wife, Jeanett, founded Divine Alternatives for Dads (DADS) in their Seattle, WA, living room in 1998. They had been homeless, unemployed addicts and had lost several of their children to the foster care system before taking steps to become sober, find housing, and obtain steady employment. Since that time, they have successfully applied lessons learned during their own recovery to help others "put their families back together." Their program focuses on helping fathers recover from addiction, return from prison, and deal with general difficulties of life. Key to their success has been effective partnerships with various community organizations and state agencies, including the state departments of Corrections, Social and Health Services, and Child Support; local employment agencies and public and private employers; King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and local courts; Atlantic Street Center, a community-based organization providing court-approved parenting classes; and Union Gospel Mission, which provides services for homeless individuals and families.[41]

Working Within an Established Organization

Fathers and Families Center in Indianapolis, IN, was founded in 1993 as the Father Resource Program of Wishard Health Services. Under the leadership of Wallace McLaughlin since its inception, the center was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) agency in 1999 and has provided self-sufficiency and job readiness training, job placement, GED preparation, other educational support, and parenting education to thousands of young parents. As an Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage grantee from 2006 to 2015, the organization also added services to assist couples in building healthy relationship skills.[42]

Return on Investment

The FATHER Project began under the auspices of the city of Minneapolis, MN, in 1999 and has been part of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota since 2004. An Office of Family Assistance grantee from 2006 to 2015, the FATHER Project has served hundreds of fathers through an extensive network of partners. A return on investment study by the Wilder Foundation showed a long-term financial return of $3.41 for every dollar invested in the project. Evaluations have shown increases in parenting skills, educational achievement, job placement, and benefits for the children of participating families.

[41] National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. (2012, July 12). *Effective strategies for working with fathers returning from prison* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/effective-strategies-working-fathers-returning-prison-nrcf-webinar

[42] National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (2018). *Spotlight on Fathers and Families Center.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/spotlight-fathers-and-families-center-o

Spotlight on...

Program Planning and Design

The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families (SCCFF) was formed in 2002 as a result of a community needs assessment and grant-making initiative by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina that began in 1996. A task force considered grant-making opportunities by posing questions such as:

- Is the issue a niche and does it represent an underserved community?
- Is there any available research on the issue and can more research be done?
- Is the issue palatable for public discourse?
- Does the issue satisfy the mission of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine?

Based on the work of this task force, the foundation decided to address the social and economic consequences of father absence through a statewide fatherhood initiative, Reducing Poverty through Father Engagement. A partnership agreement was created with the University of South Carolina to provide technical assistance, synthesize the research that became the best practices of the initiative, and design the program models. Through a second partnership agreement with the South Carolina Department of Social Services to strengthen fragile families, SCCFF was formed with the mission to develop and support a statewide infrastructure deeply invested in repairing and nurturing relationships between fathers and families. Since 2002, SCCFF has worked with numerous programs throughout the state and developed partnerships with other key agencies, such as workforce development, child protective services, and child support enforcement, to encourage program referrals and ensure that a full array of services is available.[43]

[43] National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (2017). *Spotlight on South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families*. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/spotlight-south-carolina-center-fathers-and-families

Assessing Community Needs

Before designing or providing fatherhood program services, you should first understand the needs of fathers in the community. Unless community members understand that a fatherhood program is designed to help them, they are not likely to be interested in participating or referring others.

To assess community needs, prospective program providers can:

- Hold informal conversations with community members.
- Conduct focus groups with fathers from the community.
- Draw on the experience of key staff who understand the community and the needs of fathers and families in the community.
- Review existing data from local, state, and national sources.
- Identify and talk with community organizations who already provide support for local families or share a concern about the identified need.

Organizations with a positive reputation in the community have an advantage during start-up. Staff can talk to current clients and contact others in the community for their input, either informally or in formal focus groups. New or less established organizations can also conduct these activities, particularly if they have staff who are familiar with the community.

Community Mapping

Organizations should conduct a scan of their community to identify other groups that might be offering complementary services. These organizations and agencies can:

- Be a source of participant referrals.
- Provide a specific service (e.g., job training, housing, mental health).
- Offer seed money and grants for social services.
- Become a full collaborative partner.

> **"I never hesitate to talk with other seasoned practitioners. I don't always have the expertise, but I have learned from those who taught us."**
>
> **James Worthy,**
> **Center for Urban Families**

In some cases, an alliance with another organization may be a way to expand services; or a new organization might focus on a specific population of men that is currently underserved. Identifying other social service providers can also help with:

- Goal setting.
- Insights on health care issues.
- Job training and employment opportunities.
- Referrals to support services.

By searching the Internet and talking to social service professionals, program staff can develop a comprehensive list of provider organizations in their community.

Compile a community map in a text document, spreadsheet, or other master file that includes:

- Name of organization or agency.
- Mission and description of its work.
- Key staff.
- Possible ways of contributing to your fatherhood program.

Spotlight on…

Young Fathers of Santa Fe (now known as Fathers New Mexico) conducted a scan to determine its focus on teenagers and other young fathers. The focus on young dads was instrumental in forging relationships with school health clinics, government agencies, and other community agencies with services for a similar population.

Example of an Effective Elevator Speech

Provided by Catherine Tijerina, Co-Founder and Executive Director, The RIDGE Project

"The RIDGE Project is in the business of saving lives by building a legacy of strong families. We accomplish our goal through youth development, fatherhood, healthy marriage, and reentry programs delivered across the state of Ohio."

Effective Partnerships

After identifying potential partners and key points of contact, reach out to them to explore whether a partnership could be mutually beneficial. A formal first step might be to get in touch by email, letter, or phone; less formal contact might be made when attending community events or serving on multi-agency committees. Board members and others may be able to help by providing introductions. But before talking with potential partners, fatherhood programs must be clear about what they are asking for and know how to describe their goals and strategies. One approach is to develop an "elevator speech," a brief but compelling overview of the fatherhood program that can be adjusted according to the potential partner's focus. This can be an effective springboard to outlining the ways a prospective partner can benefit from an alliance with a fatherhood program.

Experienced practitioners also recommend:

- Ask staff and board members to carry the program's brochures or other materials with them at all times so they always have information ready to show a potential partner who might help with recruitment, services, or funding.
- When speaking with individuals or organizations that may be potential partners for program referrals, explain what the fatherhood program does, why someone might participate, and how a partnership would benefit both organizations. For example:
  - If you are talking with a child support agency, focus on how the fatherhood program can help fathers improve their employment situation, manage their child support payments, and address other needs, such as the relationship with their coparent.
  - If you are talking with a Head Start agency, explain how parenting classes provided by the fatherhood program can help fathers be better parents and emphasize how that can help meet the Head Start goal of improving outcomes for children.
- When speaking with someone who could potentially provide a specific service (e.g., skills training, GED classes, legal assistance for navigating child support or custody systems, transportation, substance abuse counseling, anger management classes), make sure you understand what they offer and get feedback from community members and former participants on the quality of services.

Potential Partners to Contact

- State or local government agencies (e.g., child support enforcement, child welfare, employment, education)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) offices
- Schools/Head Start/ other preschool or early childhood programs
- Substance abuse treatment programs
- Domestic violence programs
- Faith-based organizations
- Non-profit, community-based organizations
- Hospital maternity departments
- Judges and mediators
- Attorneys
- Family support or home visiting programs
- Elected officials and their staffs
- Local businesses
- Job skills training programs
- Community colleges
- Barbershops, gyms, or other places where men congregate
- Correctional facilities
- Health clinics
- GED or ABE programs

- Encourage potential partners to visit the fatherhood program to see it in action. Visits can be particularly informative for potential funders, such as community foundations, or small- and medium-sized employers who might hire fatherhood program graduates. Try to schedule visits during an event that allows visitors to interact with fatherhood participants. By "touching their hearts," fatherhood practitioners can build enthusiasm and initiate or deepen a commitment to partnership.
- Host a forum or community events to showcase the program, its goals, and successes. Feature stories from fathers who have been directly affected by the program.
- Make presentations before community groups that potential partners or funders will attend.
- Share concrete success stories.

Formalizing Partnerships

After an organization or agency agrees to partner with a fatherhood program, experienced practitioners recommend developing a clear, written agreement between the two programs. An agreement reduces misunderstanding and helps provide continuity during staff changes. Some practitioners recommend setting initial terms that are easily agreeable and not too demanding for either partner.

Many fatherhood programs use one or more types of agreement including:

- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** – outlines the actions expected of all parties with a statement of purpose and clear delineation of roles and responsibilities.
- **Contract** – specifies terms of the partnership in a more formal agreement (strongly recommended when deliverables are required from one partner in exchange for a fee).
- **Performance-based contract** – clarifies the level of outcomes required to receive payment and specifies the repercussions for not maintaining the minimum standard of service.

All relevant staff at both organizations should be briefed about the terms of the partnership and the role of each organization.

Logic Model

Successful programs are clear about their intended outcomes and develop a service plan to meet participant needs and measure outcomes. Most public funders and many private funders now require a logic model that details program inputs, activities, and outputs with a clear statement of intended short- and long-term outcomes and how they will be measured. A simple logic model could address:

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES		
			Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
What we invest	What we do	Direct products from program activities (such as number of sessions or number of participants)	Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions	Changes in behavior or action that result from participants' new knowledge	Meaningful changes, often in participant condition or life status

"Helpful Resources" features the logic model used by the FATHER Project of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minneapolis as well as an Evaluation Toolkit and Logic Model Builder from Child Welfare Information Gateway.

Outputs and outcomes are different. Outcomes are the key goals a program wants to achieve related to attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behavior. Outputs are the means by which the program will achieve those outcomes, such as by offering workshops on father skills. A logic model should propose outcomes that are logically consistent with the changes in attitudes and behavior the program wants to achieve.

If a program is reaching short-term goals (e.g., changing parents' attitudes and behavior), funders will have more confidence that longer term goals (e.g., better child outcomes) will be reached.

Successful programs integrate carefully designed logic models into daily operations and ensure that all staff are aware of short- and long-term program goals. Staff should understand how to deliver activities to meet these goals and how to accurately track program processes to stress the importance of good documentation. Also, they should expect to receive support and encouragement from supervisors and peers.

Program Services

How effective a fatherhood program is in identifying and helping participants with their immediate and ongoing needs, either through in-house services or referrals to partner agencies, will influence whether fathers enroll and stay in the program.

Programs typically decide what services to offer based on:

- Perceived needs of participants.
- Desired program outcomes.
- Potential barriers to client participation.
- Resources available.

To reach desired program outcomes and help participants address various needs, fatherhood programs and their community partners generally provide a mix of services that can include:

- Individual case management to help clients set goals, overcome obstacles, and follow through with necessary services.
- Assistance navigating child support, child welfare, and other public systems.
- Parenting education, with a focus on the importance of father engagement and knowledge and skills to support children over the life course.
- Relationship skills education that may benefit partner, extended family, workplace, and peer network relationships.
- Peer support groups, as part of parenting or relationship skills education groups or as a separate group, to help fathers share issues, brainstorm solutions, and bond with other fathers.
- Manhood development or rites of passage activities.
- Assistance with basic education (e.g., GED, high school diploma, adult basic education) or advanced education (e.g., two- or four-year college).
- Assistance to overcome barriers to participation, such as transportation and child care.
- Job skills training.

Case management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's and family's comprehensive needs through communication and available resources to promote quality, cost-effective outcomes.[44]

[44] Case Management Society of America. *What is a case manager?* https://cmsa.org/who-we-are/what-is-a-case-manager/

- Job preparation training, including resume writing, interview techniques, and leaving voice mail messages.
- Job placement assistance.
- Legal assistance.
- Substance abuse counseling.
- Mediation services.
- Anger management.
- Domestic violence education and screening.
- General health and nutrition.
- Counseling and crisis intervention (e.g., housing, substance abuse, mental health, legal assistance, domestic violence, negotiating child support system).

Many programs provide all services in-house, but others work with partners to provide some services. Services and partnerships should be determined by the needs of a particular program and community. Services provided may also be dependent upon funding sources. Some programs also provide:

- Supportive services such as housing, health, transportation, clothing, or baby supplies.
- Food before or during a group session, particularly for evening sessions, to help participants make the transition from daily demands of work, school, or family and to create informal opportunities to bond with staff and other participants.
- Bus tokens or other transportation assistance to help clients attend program activities.
- Incentives such as gift cards or father-child events and outings.
- Certificates that mark program achievements.

> **"This is more than a job. It's got to be a calling. Even if you weren't paid for this job, you'd still be doing something like this in your life."**
>
> **Patricia Littlejohn,**
> **South Carolina**
> **Center for Fathers and Famiies**

Staffing

While leaders can bring vision, and services may attract participants, most fatherhood practitioners recognize that the quality of frontline staff is what ultimately determines whether men commit to a fatherhood program. To fulfill their mission, fatherhood programs need well trained staff who understand the challenges facing participants and the various factors that contribute to success. Organizational decision makers, leadership, and direct service staff must share a level of commitment and investment to fatherhood. Careful attention should be paid to hiring and training new staff and providing ongoing support and development for existing staff.

Competencies

Hiring decisions are among the most important choices any fatherhood program must make. The individuals who work directly with participants make a significant contribution to the success of most programs.

Experienced practitioners recommend including males in key staff positions, especially frontline service delivery. They also recommend that program staff have:

- Flexibility and ability to adapt to new situations.
- Good listening skills.
- Relevant life experience.
- Ability to build relationships.
- Capacity to assess needs and design appropriate interventions.
- Strong group facilitation skills.
- Strong awareness of local resources.

Staff must be able to:

- Relate linguistically and culturally to participants.
- Be sensitive to the needs of men and fathers.
- Be genuine, caring, respectful, and accepting.
- Serve as positive, but realistic, role models.
- See an individual's strengths and potential more readily than their challenges and deficits.
- Demonstrate teamwork and a variety of skills.[45]
- Create and maintain a culture within the fatherhood program that embodies empathy and respect for women and mothers.
- Interact professionally and respectfully with all partners, staff, and participants.

The Head Start Bureau recommends a successful fatherhood program coordinator have:

- Understanding of the important role fathers play in healthy child development.
- Commitment to children and families.
- Passion for getting fathers involved in the lives of their children.
- Empathy, respect, and high expectations for all fathers, regardless of their backgrounds.
- Ability and desire to build bridges between women and men, mothers and fathers.
- Desire and ability to develop rapport and sturdy relationships with men from diverse and unfamiliar backgrounds.
- Knowledge of and connections to the community.
- Willingness to work above and beyond the call of duty; this is not a 9-to-5 job.[46]

Although every staff member does not have to have all these skills or attributes, fatherhood program managers should hire a team with a skill set appropriate for delivering a comprehensive array of services.

[45] Wilson, P. (1997). Handout developed for NPCL Fatherhood Development Training as part of the Partners for Fragile Families project funded by the Ford Foundation.

[46] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Administration for Children and Families; Administration on Children, Youth and Families; Head Start Bureau. (2004). Building block 3: Building a foundation to work with fathers. *Building Blocks for Father Involvement Series.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/building-block-3-building-foundation-work-fathers

Key Roles

Identify key tasks and roles for implementation before recruiting and hiring program staff. Think about:

- What tasks need to be accomplished, based on the program's logic model?
- What staff roles and responsibilities will ensure these tasks are performed and project goals are met?
- What other tasks, roles, and responsibilities are likely to contribute to program success?
- How many full-time and part-time positions are necessary?
- What services might be available through partner agencies?
- What services might be provided by volunteers?

Some tasks or roles might be specialized and performed mainly by one person, while others will be performed by several staff members. Some key staff will perform multiple functions. A typical fatherhood program may only have one or two full-time positions, with other duties performed by part-time staff or volunteers. This becomes a challenge, particularly during the first six to 12 months of a program, when outreach, partnership development, and participant recruitment are the main focus. The roles of senior administrators and project champions are especially crucial to program success at these early stages.

Key responsibilities can include:

- Project direction and oversight.
- Staff supervision and support.
- Community outreach.
- Recruitment.
- Intake.
- Case management.
- Group facilitation.
- Other direct services.
- Documentation and evaluation.
- Logistical support.

Other functions such as skills training, education, job preparation, job placement, and supportive services might be carried out by program staff or partner agency staff.

"Helpful Resources" features several job descriptions used by fatherhood programs.

Hiring and Training

In addition to looking for specific key competencies, when filling staff positions, experienced fatherhood program managers look for several essential characteristics in candidates:

Flexibility: "This is not a 9-to-5 job."

Staff might facilitate evening group meetings and juggle one-to-one meetings at any time of the day in the office, at a father's home, in the community, or over the phone.

Listening skills: "This job is at least 75 percent listening. You need to show that you care more about them than you care about your own personal agenda."

Staff should be personable and engaging, but also must have the patience to listen to men and understand their situations in detail.

Life experience: "We have many [program] graduates who have helped us in recruiting dads and keeping them in the program."

While programs often hire staff with degrees in social work, business management, or other relevant fields, many select employees who know the challenges facing men from the target community.

Appropriate skills: "You can teach people about some of the issues, such as child support. But the ability to recruit and build relationships is different. If you're uncomfortable in that arena, it will show."

Employees need different skill sets to fit different roles. For example:

- Community outreach: marketing and sales skills.
- Case management: social work skills.
- Participant recruitment: ability to communicate, empathize, and build relationships with potential participants (some program graduates make successful recruiters because they have "been there, done that").

Given the demands of working in a fatherhood program, some programs ask prospective employees to attend group sessions or accompany staff on home visits to ensure a good fit.

Programs recognize that it can be OK to go outside for expertise. For example, a program that needs a dynamic facilitator might contract with external experts if no full-time staff member has facilitation skills. Program directors must carefully monitor contracted, part-time, and volunteer staff to make sure they:

- Deliver services to meet program goals. Have sufficient time for preparation and review.
- Can manage other commitments they might have.

Even if outside experts are brought in for certain sessions, case managers can be co-facilitators and build their presentation skills for future events. Many programs also encourage case managers to occasionally sit in on group sessions to identify issues that might need support service follow-up. However, other programs limit the involvement of case managers and other staff in group sessions because participants might be reluctant to divulge some information if their case manager is present.

Effective fatherhood programs typically provide orientation training for new staff and ongoing staff development to ensure employees are:

- Professional.
- Competent in program content and teaching skills.
- Sensitive to participants' cultural backgrounds.
- Responsive to program participants' needs.[47]

Promoting Employee Buy-in

Whether a fatherhood program is a small, independent initiative or part of a larger organization, buy-in and support of all staff are vital. Regardless of their responsibilities, all staff should take part in training about the overall program mission and goals as well as awareness training about the needs of fathers. Supportive staff contribute to an environment where all fathers and families can feel welcome and safe.

Staff should understand the program in order to talk positively about it. For example, if the receptionist does not do a good job of welcoming fathers, recruitment and intake efforts can be affected. Additionally, staff who work primarily with mothers should be prepared to "talk the program up" and encourage referrals. This can be particularly important if the program is part of an organization that has traditionally worked with women and children and has less experience engaging men.

Successful programs often are characterized as "mature" in that they:

- Have an agency-wide commitment to engaging fathers.
- Have staff who understand the potential positive and negative impact of fathers on their children's development.
- Consider and involve fathers in intervention planning.
- View fathers and mothers as equally important intervention targets.[48]

One popular strategy for enhancing the ability of an entire agency to embrace fatherhood work is to involve staff in father-friendliness assessment and planning activities. Strategies, a project funded by the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention, has used the *Father- Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment and Planning Tool* for training and technical assistance.[49] The tool was originally developed for use by Head Start agencies, but is applicable to a wide range of family-serving agencies. Several adaptations of the original tool, including the chart Enhancing Organizational Father-Friendliness, have been developed.

[47] National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. (2008, September). *Training program staff: Five tips for fatherhood programs.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/training-program-staff-five-tips-fatherhood-programs

[48] Burgess, A. (2009). *Fathers and parenting interventions: What works?* Fatherhood Institute. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/fathers-and-parenting-interventions-what-works

[49] National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership; National Head Start Association; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Region V; & Illinois Department of Public Aid, Division of Child Support Enforcement. (1999). *Father-friendliness organizational self-assessment and planning tool.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/father-friendliness-organizational-self-assessment-and-planning-tool

Managing and Supporting Frontline Staff

Designing, building, and sustaining an effective fatherhood program depends on various factors. Perhaps none is ultimately more important than the role played by direct service staff in their daily work with fathers. While their job is so central to program success, it can also be very demanding and stressful. Hiring qualified staff and providing orientation training is important, as is ongoing support and training.

Initial Training

Effective implementation of fatherhood programs requires staff members to be knowledgeable about the program and its participants. Training should ensure that all frontline staff understand program content, know the needs and barriers that fathers face, be sensitive to and responsive of participants' cultural backgrounds, and be aware of fathers' learning styles. Studies show that including interactive components (such as role-playing) in training sessions produces more positive program outcomes than training that uses only discussion and written materials (such as tests or manuals).[51] Interactive components produce more lasting changes and help keep participants interested and involved during activities.[52] In addition, giving staff members the opportunity to practice instruction and troubleshoot potential situations during training can help them improve program delivery and instruction. For instance, role play in which some staff members act out disruptive or monopolizing behaviors while a colleague practices delivering a curriculum activity allows the facilitator to also practice ways to manage problem behaviors during group work.

> **"Successful nonprofit managers build an atmosphere of trust, allowing staff to feel empowered, valued and supported. Fulfilled employees are easier to manage and have overall higher job satisfaction. The manager needs to actively set the tone for employee interactions and job success."**
>
> **Miki Markovich, Demand Media[50]**

> **"Staff must be willing to engage in self-improvement. I look for evidence of that during the interview process. Working with others is an earned privilege. People [program participants] don't grow and improve upon command; they respond more readily to a respectful invitation to grow 'with' staff who serve them well."**
>
> **Ted Strader, Council on Prevention and Education: Substances (COPES)**

[50] Markovich, M. (2014). *How to make nonprofit management more successful with employees.* http://smallbusiness.chron.com/make-nonprofit-management-successful-employees-18914.html

[51] National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. (2008). *Training program staff: Five tips for fatherhood programs*. https://fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/training-program-staff-five-tips-fatherhood-programs

[52] Hills, M., & Knowles, D. (1987). Providing for personal meaning in parent education programs. *Family Relations, 36*(2), 158-162. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/583946.pdf?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Involving staff in the same curricula activities that participants experience can encourage self-reflection and processing of any personal "baggage," exploration of key messages designed for participants, and practice of recommended skills.

Ted Strader, executive director of COPES in Louisville, Kentucky, stresses that beyond hiring staff who have passion for the work and care for participants, effective programs use evidence-based practices and ensure that staff are fully grounded in program principles, methods, and objectives. COPES requires all new staff to attend one of its formal curriculum certification programs, which run from 5 to 8 days depending on the curriculum. Similarly, the Fathers' Support Center in Saint Louis, Missouri, conducts a comprehensive 25-hour training program for new employees that looks at all program components from recruitment to outcome measurement. Staff then receive training three times a year on specific issues such as communication skills, parenting tips, and accessing legal services. New employees must also conduct interviews with each staff member to learn more about the role played by each person and how that fits with the overall goals of the Fathers' Support Center.

Experienced practitioners cite the value of training staff to work with fathers from a strengths-based perspective,[53] which emphasizes an individual's potential successes over apparent barriers. One popular approach is motivational interviewing, which was first developed for treating people with alcohol problems but is now used in a variety of settings to guide clients through a process of change that builds on their own values and concerns, helps them identify goals, and strengthens their motivation to change. Core elements of the approach can be applied in training staff to engage fathers in collaborative conversations focused on helping them recognize their strengths in order to prepare for change.[54]

> **"Everyone comes with baggage. I'm happy to be able to help dads unpack some of their baggage."**
>
> **Cedric Petteway, Center for Urban Families**

[53] Hammond, W. (2010). *Principles of strength-based practice.* https://greaterfallsconnections.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Principles-of-Strength-2.pdf

[54] For more information on Motivational Interviewing, see https://motivationalinterviewing.org/understanding-motivational-interviewing

Ongoing Support and Training

Reminders about the importance of applying and modeling key program concepts, such as good relationship skills, can help staff stay motivated and focused. Ongoing staff management and training should reinforce direct service skills, including:

- Outreach and recruitment.
- Communicating with fathers.
- Developing individual client plans.
- Keeping fathers involved and focused on their goals.
- Providing case management and supportive services.
- Documenting all program work to build institutional knowledge and better serve fathers.
- Facilitating groups effectively.
- Working with partner agencies.
- Navigating and accessing community resources.

Other management and training goals include helping staff members deal with difficult issues and ensuring that they understand program policies, procedures, and strategies.

To achieve these goals, experienced practitioners provide staff members with:

- Professional development opportunities.
- Reinforcement of key policies and procedures.
- Support programs.
- Peer learning and support.
- Reflective supervision.
- Performance reviews.

Professional Development

Experienced managers encourage or require program staff to attend professional conferences or in-service training on topics such as understanding child support, cultural relevance, group facilitation, using a specific curriculum, and motivational interviewing.

The Fathers and Families Center in Indianapolis, Indiana, ensures all staff have the opportunity to attend at least one professional conference at the national, state, or local level. Halbert Sullivan, Founding President and CEO of the Fathers Support Center emphasizes the importance of regular in-service training for all staff, including direct-service staff, managers, supervisors, coordinators, and directors. Fathers Support Center staff are expected to attend at least two trainings per year. Sullivan says, "It is important that our supervisory and management staff understand the 'new millennium' young staff persons entering the workplace. This team must keep up with the changing use of technology and social media." Some programs plan occasional or annual retreats to allow busy staff to decompress, participate in fun activities, and get re-energized for their work. Patricia Littlejohn, Executive Director of the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families, makes sure that staff members receive new information relevant to them and their participants. Littlejohn says, "We give them inspirational information. You need to recognize that your staff is in need of nurturing."

Understanding ethics and boundaries is an important part of staff training provided by many fatherhood programs. Some of the most effective staff members can be those who come from similar backgrounds and have experienced the same issues and barriers that participants face. Providing ongoing training and supervision to help them maintain appropriate boundaries can be valuable. As Andrew Freeberg, Director of Community Programs at the Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project in Minneapolis, points out: "Many of our staff live in the communities we serve and may cross paths frequently with participants in the community. Training on how to anticipate and handle these situations has been helpful."

The agency's mission and reputation in the community also should be reviewed during training, in addition to the purpose of various program activities. If a program has a good logic model that links program services and intended outcomes, staff should become familiar with it so they can understand how their individual efforts contribute to the collective mission.

Reinforcing Key Policies and Procedures

Besides agency-specific policies, such as how to complete a timesheet, sexual harassment policies, or understanding of employee benefits, employees also need periodic training on general topics related to the safe delivery of specific programs and activities. For instance, all staff need to know how to handle and make appropriate referrals for crises involving domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse or misuse, mandatory reporting of child abuse, and other serious issues.

To ensure that staff understand the importance of collecting and managing data accurately, successful programs periodically review data collection procedures. They emphasize the value of making sure intake questionnaires, needs assessments, pre- and post-tests, follow-up forms, and customer satisfaction surveys are complete and the data are stored and accessible to other team members when needed. The NRFC offers tips on data collection and management in Using Documentation and Data in Fatherhood Programs.

Staff Support

Scheduling group or individual meetings on evenings or weekends can lead to stress for full-time staff who must juggle inconsistent hours. Part-time staff may have to juggle program duties with other part-time jobs. Some fatherhood program staff describe their job as being "24/7" because they never know when they may be called to help a participant in crisis. Consequently, frontline staff need understanding and support from management to help them maintain their personal well-being while being ready to help participants deal with personal situations that can be stressful and overwhelming. Ted Strader of COPES emphasizes the importance of employee assistance programs to help staff focus on their own self-improvement and well-being. He notes, "People who help others can become unexpectedly surprised by the very issues their clients are experiencing. Sometimes, we rediscover our childhood traumas and pains. It's nice to know the agency or the boss understands and can remain supportive while we regroup and come back stronger. Further, we may return with a little greater sensitivity to those we serve."

Providing good health benefits and encouraging staff to use vacation time can help create a sense of well-being that carries over to program participants. Several long-standing programs close over the year-end holiday period, with full pay to staff to reward them and avoid burn out. Other programs ensure they have adequate staffing to provide coverage during vacations. Staff members know their work will continue and they can resume easily when they return.

Many programs foster a good work/life balance and encourage staff to spend time with their own families. The Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project maintains a 40-hour work week for non-exempt staff. Andrew Freeberg points out that the program ties this policy to staff training on ethics and boundaries, with a focus on the importance of self-care. He reports, "We emphasize being in the work for a marathon and not getting burned out. Don't be constantly available to participants or give them your personal cell phone number to avoid getting frequent calls on evenings and weekends."

Peer Learning and Support

Experienced practitioners note the importance of applying and modeling good relationship skills in all interactions with colleagues, partners, and participants. Genuinely listening, being non-judgmental, treating everyone with respect, and working together for optimal outcomes are considered essential for program success.

A team approach to case management, which encourages peer learning and support, promotes excellence for both new and experienced employees. At the Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project, managers meet with frontline staff each week to discuss the status of specific participants. With case managers responsible for an average of 25 individuals, each meeting covers four to five participants per case manager. As a result, there is an in-depth discussion of each participant at least once a month within the agency.

A team approach also can be used to support group facilitators. Observing other facilitators during group sessions and meeting regularly to debrief, share challenges, and discuss techniques can be a valuable way to build teamwork and strengthen skills. Some programs conduct job shadowing or mentoring so new staff can learn from more experienced colleagues.

To promote teamwork, one experienced manager includes staff in key decisions. "There is no one with better perspective than the staff dealing with fathers," he says. "Getting their buy-in is important. It shows that you respect them and value their input."

No staff member should be asked to do too much, and managers should recognize the diverse skills that individuals bring to the job. Remind staff they are not expected to solve every issue on their own and encourage them to work with each other to identify resources and solutions. Collaboration and information exchange can reduce personal stress for staff, create more effective programs, and lead to better outcomes for clients. For instance, some programs assign a male/female staff team to work with a father and the mother of his child to provide parenting tips and help resolve issues such as financial support, custody, and visitation. In other cases, such as providing assistance to a father dealing with stress or depression, involving a colleague with mental health training or making an outside referral may be advisable.

Spotlight on...

Staffing Practices and Participant Retention

How programs are staffed and how staff interact with participants affect participant retention.

- Providing case management or service referral components can increase retention rates.[55]
- Fathers are likely to feel welcome and connected to a program when they see familiar faces over time.
  - Programs should try to minimize staff turnover.[56]
  - All staff, from facilitators to leadership to support staff, should support the program mission, make an effort to connect with participants, and treat them with respect.[57]
  - One study empirically validated higher retention rates in incarcerated father programs where staff had built rapport with participants.[58]
- Fathers are more likely to stay in programs that operate from strengths-based perspectives and use techniques such as motivational interviewing.[59]
  - Don't assume that fathers are trying to shirk responsibility for child care.
  - Do assume that they are likely looking to strengthen their parenting and family relationships.
  - Recognize that fathers' experiences have given them wisdom and knowledge and they may know how best to motivate each of their children.

[55] Bronte-Tinkew, J., Burkhauser, M., & Metz, A. (2012). Elements of promising practices in father hood programs: Evidence-based research findings on interventions for fathers. *Fathering,* 10 (1): 6-30.

[56] Mitchell, S. J., See, H. M., Tarkow., A. K. H., Cabrera, N., McFadden, K. E., & Shannon, J. D. (2007). Conducting studies with fathers: Challenges and opportunities, *Applied Developmental Science,* 11(4): 239-244.

[57] Ibid.

[58] McKay, T., Lindquist, C., & Bir, A. (2013). *Five years later: Final implementation lessons from the evaluation of the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for incarcerated and reentering fathers and their partners.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/five-years-later-final-implementation-lessons-evaluation-responsible-fatherhood-marriage-family

[59] Gordon, D.M., Oliveros, A., Hawes, S.W., Iwamoto, D.K., & Rayford, B.S. (2012). Engaging fathers in child protection services: A review of factors and strategies across ecological systems. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 34(8): 1399-1417.

Reflective Supervision

Reflective supervision acknowledges the emotional intrusiveness of the work performed by frontline staff in fatherhood programs and seeks to build employee resilience. In a process that mirrors effective frontline work with fathers, reflective supervision incorporates motivational interviewing skills such as an ability to listen, wait, and allow the person being supervised to discover solutions, concepts, and perceptions on his own without interruption or suggestion. With reflective supervision, supervisors:

- Form trusting relationships with practitioners.
- Establish consistent and predictable meetings and meeting times.
- Ask questions that elicit details about work and emerging issues with clients.
- Listen.
- Remain emotionally present.
- Teach/guide.
- Nurture/support.
- Integrate emotion and reason.
- Foster a reflective process that can be internalized by the person being supervised.[60]

[60] Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health. (2014). *Best practice guidelines for reflective supervision/consultation.* www.macmh.org/infant-early-childhood-division/guidelines-reflective-supervision; Parlakian, R. (2002). *Look, listen, and learn: Reflective supervision and relationship-based work.* Zero to Three.

Performance Reviews

Most programs conduct at least annual employee performance reviews. The Fathers Support Center has quarterly performance updates for a more immediate focus and to help staff identify areas they may need to address. Halbert Sullivan notes, "It helps build confidence when you are recognized for your work more frequently and also helps staff move toward accomplishing goals set in annual performance reviews." Staff are encouraged to conduct a self-evaluation before annual performance reviews and analyze how well they accomplished their previous year's goals.

Some programs combine formal reviews with more informal, ongoing assessment and feedback. For example, managers can observe employees' interaction with clients and meet with them individually to review strengths and offer advice on areas for improvement.

Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project staff submit monthly performance reports with information directly linked to key project benchmarks. Besides helping staff manage participant needs and progress, this information gives staff and managers data for annual performance reviews.

As part of a continuous quality improvement process, some programs conduct focus groups or participant surveys to obtain fathers' views on staff performance and activities. New dads, long-time participants, and program alumni may be asked to provide feedback. Focus group attendees are not typically paid for giving their opinions, but programs generally provide food, child care, or other incentives for participants' contributions. Some programs collect participant evaluations at the end of group sessions and analyze responses to assess strengths and weaknesses of individual facilitators.

Careful review of all available information can be invaluable for managers. At one program, a participant described a facilitator as being condescending. That feedback gave the director the opportunity to talk with the facilitator, discuss what might be going on, and recommend a different approach. Information can also be gathered through observation. For instance, one manager witnessed a conversation between a staff person and a client during which the staffer was overly critical of the client's decision to stay in an abusive relationship, which ultimately led to the client leaving the program. This experience indicated a need to reassess the agency's domestic violence policies and alerted the manager to a need for refresher training.

To recognize accomplishments and reinforce positive skills, some programs offer individual or team spot bonuses, while others host team breakfasts or potluck lunches.

Spotlight on...

Management Tips for Nonprofits[61]

- Be honest. Create an open forum of communication based on truth. Model this communication style, and specify workplace communication expectations.
- Express organization and workplace values. Discuss the organization's mission.
- Create a team charter or mission. Discuss overall team objectives and their importance.
- Set specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic goals. Ensure everyone on the team knows the goals and feels like an active member in evoking positive change.
- Educate staff on each other's roles.
- Reward team members. Recognize progress as well as goals met. This will raise morale and build confidence. A happy, confident team is a joy to manage.
- Share leadership.

[61] Markovich, M. (2014). *How to make nonprofit management more successful with employees.* http://smallbusiness.chron.com/make-nonprofit-management-successful-employees-18914.html

The tool was originally developed for use by Head Start agencies, but is applicable to a wide range of family-serving agencies. Several adaptations of the original tool, including the chart *Enhancing Organizational Father-Friendliness*, have been developed.

Budgeting and Fundraising

A fatherhood program's budget can depend on whether the program is independent or part of a larger organization and if there is start-up funding. Experienced practitioners recommend:

- Reserving part of a new program's budget for development and fundraising, including outreach to government agencies and businesses through research, presentations, and follow-up.
- Hiring a grant writer to help identify revenue sources and develop applications for local foundations and government grants.
- Fostering a strong commitment to data collection and evaluation to demonstrate quality performance and document program effectiveness. Consider the experience of a program manager: "The corporate world wants a return on investment. You've got to develop a track record before you start going to the general public."
- Making strategic additions to the program's board of directors. Says a fatherhood practitioner, "As a staff person I've asked a group for money and the answer is 'no.' But, if the 'ask' comes from a prominent person in the community, it's a different answer."

Fatherhood programs that cannot rely on a stable in-house source of funds should begin fundraising immediately. Fundraising activities typically include:

- Cultivating local opportunities through in-person meetings with potential funders.
- Writing grants for federal, state, and local government funds.
- Reaching out to local foundations, a process that may include a combination of in-person meetings and grant proposals.
- Building collaborations with existing organizations that may be able to provide funding and/or expertise to a new fatherhood program.

Program support is not always financial. Some fatherhood programs receive support from nontraditional or in-kind sources such as local corporations or civic groups. Even if these organizations do not make a direct contribution, they might provide free equipment or volunteer staff. Local businesses or partner agencies sometimes donate food, materials, clothes, supplies, services, staff time, or space for group meetings. By recruiting community members or college students as interns or volunteers, some programs have been able to get additional help with administrative tasks, community mapping, participant recruitment, and general planning.

Targeted fundraising can be an effective way to generate additional resources, but can be time consuming. Programs should involve their board of directors and staff whenever possible. A strong board should be able to help identify local, regional, and national funding opportunities and make fundraising presentations.

Fundraising Tips for New Programs

Experienced practitioners offer several suggestions for effective fundraising:

- Look for creative ways to access funds. While a funder's mission statement may not specifically include the word "fatherhood," there may still be interest in supporting fathers as part of wider goals to help low-income residents, reduce unemployment, promote stable families, or improve child well-being.
- Find out where employees of local companies volunteer their time. This information could indicate where a company makes its charitable donations.
- Do your homework! Library or Internet research will help you learn about the priorities and procedures of potential funders. Read the business section of your local newspaper to learn about local companies' interests.
- The most consistent donations are likely to come from foundation staff who believe in your program. Develop and nurture your personal contacts or work with a fundraiser who already has those contacts.
- "Blind" or "cold" proposals are not usually successful. If you do not have a personal contact at a company or foundation, start with an inquiry letter.
- In writing grants and proposals, follow all of the organization's guidelines and requirements. If the guidelines state "no more than 5 pages, 12-point font, double spaced," do not submit a longer document in a different format.
- Have a sound logic model. Define your objectives clearly and show how your program is expected to meet measurable outcomes.
- Share impactful outcomes supported by program data and participant success stories.

Documentation and Sustainability

Even if a fatherhood program builds a strong staff, gains momentum in its community, and becomes recognized for providing quality services, sustainability challenges can remain if funding sources and community issues shift. Ultimately, programs succeed because they deliver effective services and can adapt to a changing fiscal landscape. Hiring a part-time or full-time grant writer can help a program broaden its funding base. But programs must also be able to demonstrate a track record of outcomes and accomplishments. Having a solid record of success can help a program mature into a long-lasting community institution. Therefore, consistent, comprehensive data collection should always be part of program design.

Data collection tools should be clear, efficient, and tied in a logical way to program implementation. Management and leadership should articulate the importance and rationale of tracking information and encourage full staff engagement in the process. The data can be used to:

- Demonstrate program success.
- Identify areas for program modifications and improvements.
- Provide a powerful story for local and state government agencies, foundations, businesses, and other partners who can have an important impact on long-term program sustainability.

Effective communication and marketing strategies will help your program connect with dads and prompt them to move from interest to involvement.

Spotlight on…

The ***Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo***, which served fathers and their families from 1998 to 2019, measured its success based on outcomes that included:

- Number of established paternities.
- Number of dads with on-time child support payments.
- Child well-being: extent to which children are current on immunizations and wellcare visits and whether they have a permanent provider of medical care.
- Number of dads who participate in regular home visits to help them understand children's developmental stages.
- Positive involvement of dads in the parenting of their children.

Through extensive data collection and evaluation, the program documented that:

- 74% of participants were Hispanic.
- Dads ranged in age from 13 to 40, with an average age of 20.
- 97% of moms and dads regularly participated in home visits.
- 84% of mothers and fathers were working, in school, or in job training programs.
- Nearly all (96%) participated in the paternity and child support/establishment process.
- 87% were positively involved in parenting their children as demonstrated by:
    - Attending to children's health and safety needs.
    - Showing interest in and knowledge of the developmental stages of their children based on their responses to a developmental assessment.
    - Engaging in developmentally appropriate stimulation with their children.
    - Providing primary child care at least once a week for two hours.

The ***Center for Urban Families (CFUF)*** is a Baltimore, MD, program that serves a predominantly African-American population. It focuses on outcomes such as:

- Reduced recidivism.
- Increased employment in jobs earning at least $15 an hour.
- Increased awareness of the child support system and its obligations.

The mission of CFUF is to strengthen urban communities by helping fathers and families achieve stability and economic success. Some of the ways that mission has been accomplished are:

- Between 2008 and 2013, CFUF secured over 2,100 jobs for Baltimore city residents with 21.7% of the jobs going to residents with serious barriers to employment including criminal background.
- The average minimum wage for initial and re-placements was $10.65 an hour.
- In addition to general job readiness training, 70 participants received training certifications in fork lift, food service, and construction between 2010 and 2013.
- As a result of the Baltimore Responsible Father Project, 33 enrolled fathers who owed child support contributed over $87,000 to their child support payments.

Top Takeaways

The following are some key considerations for starting or enhancing a fatherhood program:

- New programs should conduct a scan of organizations and programs in the community (i.e., community mapping) to identify other groups providing similar services and to find potential partners.
- Through program design, fatherhood organizations can set strategies to meet participant needs through services. Fatherhood program services often include case management, peer support groups, and parenting education.
- Encouraging potential partners to visit the program location or participate in community forums can help build partner commitment and awareness of the program throughout the community.
- An MOU or contract is helpful for building new community relationships and strengthening existing ones.
- Research and practice show that successful programs have key staff members with a deep passion for the work, and often have a champion who can overcome initial barriers and forge strategic alliances in the community.
- Early planning should determine:
  - Needs the program will address.
  - Actions the program will take to directly address these needs.
  - Staffing needed.
  - Budget plan that supports the goals.
- Reserve part of a new program's budget for development and fundraising that can include personal outreach by fatherhood managers and writing grant proposals for government agencies and foundations.
- Use a logic model to help develop a service plan. Include information on projected inputs, activities, outputs, and short- and long-term goals.
- The right hiring decisions are essential. Employees should have flexibility, listening skills, life experience, ability to serve as positive role models, and sensitivity to the needs of men and fathers.
- Fatherhood programs without a stable in-house source of funds should begin fundraising immediately, through in person outreach to individuals and businesses as well as proposals for government and foundation funding. A program's board of directors can be critical in fundraising efforts.
- A commitment to outcomes and evaluation can generate robust information about the success of programming and can be the foundation of marketing to local governments, foundations, and businesses to enhance sustainability.
- The goals of ongoing training and support include reinforcing direct service skills, helping staff members deal with difficult issues, and ensuring that they understand program policies, procedures, and strategies.
- Reminders about the importance of applying and modeling key program concepts, such as good relationship skills, can help staff stay motivated and focused.
- Training that includes interactive components, such as role-playing, is most effective for preparing staff for the situations they have to deal with.
- Carrying out the same activities that participants experience encourages staff to engage in their own self-improvement process and ensures they are fully grounded in program principles, methods, and objectives.
- Programs must nurture both new and experienced staff to prevent potential burnout in a demanding job. Using a team approach and reflective supervision are good ways to do this.
- As part of a continuous quality improvement process, some programs conduct focus groups or participant surveys to obtain fathers' views on staff performance and activities.

Helpful Resources

- NRFC Tips for Professionals, Staff Selection: What's Important for Fatherhood Programs? from the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.
- InfoSheet 8: Preparing for Father Work from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network offers insights on program design.
- Basic Fatherhood Training Curriculum from the National Family Preservation Network features activities designed to encourage buy-in of all program staff.
- 6 Ways to Create a Useful Logic Model was created by the National Fatherhood Initiative for the National Responsible Fatherhood Capacity Building Initiative.
- Evaluation Toolkit and Logic Model Builder from Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Indiana Fathers and Families: Sample Evaluation Tools for Fathers and Families Projects has strategies to help grantees measure their outcomes.
- The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation from the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation.
- Kids Count Data Center, from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, provides valuable state and cross-state information on child well-being and family stability. The data can be useful for crafting strong proposals for government or foundation funding.
- Measuring Financial Support Provided by Fathers in Fatherhood Programs from the Fatherhood and Research Practice Network (Pearson, J. & Thoennes, N).
- Guidebook to the Responsible Fatherhood Project Participant Management Information System from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs: A Toolkit for Cities from the National League of Cities provides information on uses for a management information system (MIS); instructions for sourcing, implementing, and expanding an MIS; and information on leading commercial MIS vendors.
- Principles of Strength-Based Practice by Wayne Hammond of Resiliency Initiatives (2010) explains the benefits of a strength-based approach designed to help people take control of their own lives by identifying opportunities and solutions rather than a deficit-based approach focused more on problems and hopelessness. This short paper provides tips and core principles to guide practitioners towards the implementation of strength-based practice.

> "I don't ask partner agencies to give a father my brochure in the hope that he [the father] will call me. Rather, I ask the partner agency to describe the program, give the father the brochure, and ask, 'Is it OK if I have the fatherhood program call you?' so gaining the father's passive consent for me to get in touch."
>
> Barry McIntosh,
> Young Fathers of Santa Fe

As fatherhood programs develop their capacity to identify potential partners, establish partnership agreements, and begin their work with dads, they also should design a strategic outreach component. Although dynamic outreach certainly enhances a program's positive visibility among potential partners and funders, its most important outcome is increased awareness among community members and prospective participants. Communicating effectively will help boost recruitment, which can validate a program's mission and advance its sustainability.

Communications

Use visually appealing and carefully written products—brochures, flyers, business cards, newsletters, postcards—and effective media outreach to establish your program's brand in the community. They are the calling cards program staff can distribute at local events or locations.

Key considerations are:

- Create products to suit the audience. Potential funders, community partners, and participants have different information needs and require tailored messages.
- Make publications and other products available in both English and Spanish, or other languages spoken by large numbers of the target population. Make sure translations are accurate and convey the concepts as intended.
- Keep the writing simple. Use short sentences.
- Use language that is easily understandable. A good rule of thumb is to write for a 6th grade or lower reading level and limit the use of words with three or more syllables.[62]
- Use attractive photos and colors.
- Be sure that people in the photos represent the target audience. Also make sure the program has permission to use images.
- Do not clutter the page. Use words and images sparingly and leave adequate white space.
- Remember that printed materials are primarily a tool to start a conversation with a possible funder or participant. Limit the information in brochures or other publications to the essentials. Don't try to tell them everything there is to know about the program.

[62] McLaughlin, G. H. (1969). Simple measure of gobbledygook (SMOG) Grading — A New Readability Formula. *Journal of Reading 12*(8): 639–646. For more information see https://yamm.finance/wiki/SMOG_(Simple_Measure_Of_Gobbledygook).html and https://codepen.io/wraybowling/pen/yJMZmK

Effective communication and marketing strategies will help your program connect with dads and prompt them to move from interest to involvement.

One-to-one conversation is a powerful way to build awareness about a program. If brochures are left at a particular location, make sure people there can describe the program's services effectively. For example, when leaving products at a barbershop, the barber should be able to briefly describe the benefits of the program. Or staff might be assigned to a partner location—for example, a weekly visit to a Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program office—to combine personal contact with offering literature and information.

Working With Media

Contacting local media is an effective way to gain momentum for a fatherhood program. The goal of media relations typically is to increase awareness of the program and its services while creating opportunities for one-to-one interaction that will lead to partnership development and participant recruitment.

- Print media (e.g., newspapers, community circulars, neighborhood and community newsletters) and broadcast outlets (e.g., radio and TV) are good outreach targets. Sometimes a call or email to a reporter is enough to start an ongoing relationship. Many programs also regularly submit news releases, calendar announcements, media advisories, or other news items to earn coverage. Writing community columns and letters to the editor are also proven strategies for gaining media visibility.
- Local media personalities or representatives can provide a well-known face to get people's attention. Invite such individuals to speak at events, host a program graduation dinner, or broadcast from a live event. These personalities could also join the fatherhood group's board of directors. First, take time to cultivate a relationship based on trust and respect. Identify these individuals carefully to ensure their personal and family histories are a good match with the program's goals.
- A public service announcement (PSA) on radio or TV can help in reaching the target population. Although fatherhood programs will not be able to control if and when the PSAs run, they can do detailed research to pinpoint the broadcast outlets that prospective partners or participants are listening to and watching.
- Offer to be a fatherhood resource to local media. Share information with local editors, establish an ongoing relationship with key media representatives, have sustained visibility with a column in a community publication, or contact media on specific occasions only, such as Father's Day or to recognize a particular milestone or achievement.[63]

[63] Spain, M. (Presenter). (2008, May 27). *Utilizing the NRFC media campaign and working with your local media.* [Webinar]. National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/utilizing-nrfc-media-campaign-and-working-your-local-media-nrfc-webinar

Interviews

A key to working effectively with any media outlet is to be able to tell compelling stories about the program's services and impacts on participants. Interviews can be great vehicles for telling a program's success stories, but they can backfire if the interviewees are not fully prepared. Many programs avoid this by designating a specific staff person who will work with the media. All staff should be oriented to the program's policy regarding media contact. They should know how to respond if contacted directly by the media (e.g., refer the person to the designated staff person or to the executive director).

INTERVIEW TIPS[64]		
BEFORE AN INTERVIEW	**DURING AN INTERVIEW**	**FOR ON-CAMERA INTERVIEW**
Understand the reporter's perspective; know what angle he or she is likely to take; request interview questions in advance, if possible	Remember that nothing is off the record	Dress appropriately, avoiding white or busy clothing
Look at the relationship with the reporter as potentially long term	Be brief, concise, and honest; KISS: keep it short and simple	Look at the interviewer not the camera
Know the reporter's deadline for the story	Provide context, facts, and perspective	If possible, don't wear tinted or reflective glasses
Anticipate questions and rehearse the key points you want to get across	Emphasize key messages at every opportunity	Use natural gestures and facial expressions
Think about one or two sound bites that best describe your program's benefits	Provide your website and phone number	Use appropriate body language
Give any participants time to think about what they might want to share and any issues or personal details they do not want to address	Stay calm and avoid speculation	Avoid nodding while the interviewer speaks

[64] Spain, M. (Presenter). (2008, May 27). *Utilizing the NRFC media campaign and working with your local media.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/utilizing-nrfc-media-campaign-and-working-your-local-media-nrfc-webinar

Recruitment

The ability to recruit fathers is one of the key measures of a fatherhood program's success. Effective recruitment requires staff who have flexibility, life experience, and listening skills. They should also have:

- Knowledge of the community.
- Solid presentation skills.
- Ability to relate to the target population.
- Ability to act naturally and "be themselves."
- Ability to be persistent in a respectful way.

In addition to training recruitment staff, fatherhood programs should make sure staff have enough time to spend on recruiting dads. Some programs can achieve recruitment goals with part-time recruiting staff, but many programs have found that recruitment requires more attention. Particularly during the first year of operation, before word-of-mouth has begun to spread in the community, recruitment can be a full-time job for one or more staff. Some programs use a combination of full-time recruitment staff and part-time assistance from other program staff or volunteers. Other programs hire program graduates to spread the word and recruit other fathers.

> **"We are in the community knocking on doors, standing on the streets, in subway stations, etc.... People know us. Word of mouth kicks in after that. Seventy percent of the people that come through our doors actually met us on the streets. We tell people it is hard, but we show them how to get what they need."**
>
> **James Worthy,**
> **Center for Urban Families**

> **"Just let it be known that fathers are welcome and that they will be treated with respect as an equal. Pretty simple."**
>
> **Fatherhood Program Participant[65]**

[65] Minnesota Fathers and Families Network. (2011). *Sector analysis, linking athers: Father involvement in early childhood programs* (p. 18). https://www.mnfathers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Early-Childhood-Sector-Analysis.pdf

> **"You can't put up a sign that says, 'Fatherhood Class—Free Food.' Most of these guys have to be 'relation shipped' into these classes."**
>
> **Rozario Slack,**
> **Rozario Slack Enterprises**

Although some staff might be recruitment specialists, a strong recruitment effort requires all program staff to be engaged. All staff members should thoroughly understand the program goals and service delivery approach so they can effectively outline the potential benefits to others. All staff should:

- Have high expectations for all fathers.
- Be nonjudgmental. Start where a father is, not where you think he should be or where stereotypes might lead you.
- Be respectful. View each dad as an equal human being worthy of respect and dignity.
- Communicate on an equal level, rather than a position of superiority.
- Be patient. Be willing to hang in there with men who will have ups and downs.
- Demonstrate genuine and ongoing caring.
- Earn their trust.
- Be real and down to earth.
- Use language and messages that men will respond to.
- Ask explorative questions in a non-threatening manner. Allow time for men to respond and open up to you.
- Form connections with men by engaging or joining them in some activity. Let conversation happen as you do something together.
- Assume that all men can be reached. Look for opportunities to meet specific needs and be prepared to follow up as often as it takes.
- Invite dads personally to specific activities. Follow up regularly if they do not attend.
- Ensure the program is inviting (e.g., positive pictures of dads) and accessible (e.g., flexible hours).
- Limit your use of the "P" word. P is for parent; most dads don't feel included by it. Say and write "moms and dads" or "fathers and mothers."
- Tell dads how their involvement benefits their kids.
- Offer the potential for employment assistance, which can be an important recruitment incentive if employment services are available.[66]
- Be realistic and transparent in describing what services and support your program can provide.

[66] Wilson, P., & Vann, N. (1997). *Partners for Fragile Families: Fatherhood development training* [Handout]. Copy in possession of author.

Finding Participants

Some fatherhood programs receive mandatory referrals from child support agencies, family courts, or probation officers. Other programs focus on voluntary intake or referrals from social service agencies or community partners. A single source of referrals, particularly during program start-up, is not adequate for most programs. Plan to carry out an array of different recruitment approaches.

- Get to know—and go—where the fathers are (barbershops, community centers, employment programs, basketball courts, and other locations in the community where men regularly go).
- Spend time at family court or child support offices to talk with fathers who might be eager for assistance.
- Have a presence at community events—in urban, suburban, or rural environments—where you can talk informally with fathers about your program and their needs.
- Leave door hangers with contact and other essential program information at the homes of potential participants.
- Use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to reach out to fathers.
- Recruit program graduates to be ambassadors; their stories can be a powerful recruitment tool.
- Encourage every staff member, board member, and participant to be ready to talk to potential participants anytime, anywhere.
- Be prepared to "over-recruit." Not all recruited fathers will enroll in the program.

As your program becomes more established, word-of-mouth recruiting from program graduates, partner agencies, satisfied employers, and others is likely to lead to the majority of referrals. Providing meaningful services becomes one of the best recruiting tools in the long run.

Opportunities for Engagement

From time to time, all fathers deal with difficult issues. They might seek out other men and ask questions or, more likely, they:

- Learn from the media.
- Learn by observing other men in their community.
- Struggle to get by without assistance.

Many practitioners agree that fathers do not readily come to family agencies to ask for help; in fact, they are not typically encouraged to do so. But if programs anticipate situations in which they might connect with men in need, they can take advantage of opportunities to engage and recruit dads. For instance, some practitioners have referred to "points of pain" or "life transition points" as times when men may be more reachable. By offering immediate assistance or providing an understanding ear at such times, it is possible to build a trusting relationship with a future client. Identifying individuals or organizations that have contact with fathers at these times can allow fatherhood program staff to introduce themselves and provide these potential referral sources with information to give fathers about ways they might benefit from the program.

Less traumatic opportunity points can occur at various life transitions when fathers are more open to talking about fatherhood's demands. For example, some programs have found creative ways to connect with future participants by:

- Developing relationships with hospital maternity wards, which can lead to direct referrals of expectant parents, formal opportunities to meet with groups of expectant parents, or informal conversations with expectant dads in the waiting area.
- Working with school counselors to connect with parents as their children move from one school level to another or identify children who are having problems at school.
- Helping child welfare workers locate and work with nonresidential fathers if there is a possibility of a child being removed from the home or other concern about the child's situation.
- Connecting with a local military base to work with fathers as they transition in and out of the home for deployment or when they leave military service.
- Identifying fathers of children with special health care needs, perhaps through their primary health care provider.

Examples of points of pain that present opportunities to engage fathers:

- Unemployment.
- Substantial child support payments.
- Divorce or separation.
- Custody or visitation issues.
- Incarceration.
- Unplanned pregnancy.

Potential partners or referral sources:

- Child support workers.
- Family court judges.
- Legal Aid staff.
- Lawyers.
- Court mediators.
- Probation officers.
- Corrections officers.
- Teachers/school counselors.
- Child welfare workers.
- Faith leaders.
- Crisis housing or shelter staff.

Additional life transition points with engagement opportunities include:

- Preparing for marriage.
- Becoming a stepfather or foster father.
- Dealing with the loss of a relative or close friend.
- Raising children as a single father, either full-time or part-time.
- Having children in multiple households and facing co-parenting challenges.

Fathers in their teens or early 20s can face particular challenges because they have not completed their own transition from adolescence to adulthood. While some recruitment strategies can be effective regardless of the father's age, program staff should be trained to take alternative approaches in recruiting young dads. A young father is more likely to feel confused about his role as a father and excluded by the reactions of extended family members, compared to older fathers who more commonly face issues related to employment or child support.

Connecting With Dads

Because many fathers do not come readily to fatherhood programs or even recognize the benefits of doing so, it is crucial that programs foster a welcoming environment and that staff are well prepared for all opportunities to connect and talk with fathers.

Do's:

- Use welcoming words in speaking and in writing. For example, stay away from judgmental terms such as "deadbeat dads."
- Use recruiters with backgrounds similar to those of the targeted participants. Although any recruiter can potentially be highly effective, veteran practitioners agree that fathers are more likely to join a program when recruited by someone who is culturally, racially, or linguistically similar.
- Register and involve men in the program immediately after they express an interest in participating. Immediate follow-up with recruited fathers encourages them to participate. Recruited fathers are more likely to become active participants with a quick transition from initial interest to involvement.
- Decide on an appropriate staff dress code. Some programs encourage recruiters to dress down for street recruitment; others emphasize professional dress at all times to establish credibility and serve as an example of men's aspirations. At the Center for Urban Families in Baltimore, MD, staff wear suits and ties and employment program participants are required to dress similarly. The program maintains an inventory of donated clothing fathers can choose from if needed.
- Focus only on the things you can realistically offer. Don't be tempted to provide instant solutions as you "feel the pain" of some fathers. Veteran recruiters stress that their role is to listen, empathize, and look for ways to guide men in a new direction. Promising easy solutions only sets fathers and the program up for failure. The journey to success is a long one, and successful practitioners find ways to help fathers set short-term goals that can eventually lead to longer term outcomes.
- Hire recruitment staff who can forge connections based on mutual respect and caring. When asked about factors that kept them involved with a program, many successful graduates talk about the love they felt from program staff. Many men who participate in fatherhood programs have not had consistent support and nurturance in their lives.
- Start from a strengths-based perspective. View every father coming through the door as an essential resource to his family and children, regardless of immediate barriers.
- Place reminder calls for parenting classes, activities, and other program components.
- Carry through with planned program activities, even if only one or two participants show up, especially early on in the program.
- Support staff in making every visit a father has to the program a positive, productive experience so that they feel valued.

Don'ts:

- Use words such as "class" or "program" that might have negative connotations for men with bad experiences in school or other social service programs.
- Make generic statements such as "we can make you a better father," which suggests a negative perspective on your part before you know a father's story.
- Give up. Persuasive, persistent recruiters can ultimately break through resistance from potential participants by showing they are unwilling to give up on them. Many fathers struggle to accept that program staff really see the best in them and want to help.

One-to-One Connections

Outreach and recruitment are designed to create one-to-one opportunities to talk with fathers in the community, listen to their story, and determine how the program can be helpful to them. Recruitment staff can make the most of one-to-one opportunities for informal conversation or formal intake procedures in several key ways:

- Create a safe, non-threatening dialogue.
- Listen actively and empathetically to the person with whom you are talking.
- Find common ground.

- Create a level of comfort.
- Establish personal and organizational credibility.
- Use empathetic listening—be willing to listen solely to understand what the other person means and feels, without judging, rebutting, advising, or contradicting. There is no way you can respond to questions if you have not truly understood where the other person is coming from and what they mean.
- Make the program real for potential clients by speaking about its benefits.
- Do not sell. Remember that the needs of the potential participant are important, not meeting program enrollment goals. Establishing possibilities is the difference between hard sell and enrollment.
- Give examples of the benefits dads, children, and families will gain and the types of skills they can learn.
- Give all pertinent information and answer questions.
- Ask a question, such as, "How do you think you might benefit from participating in this program?"
- Encourage commitment to enter the program.[67]

Additional Recruitment Strategies

Fatherhood practitioners use diverse ways to find and connect with fathers. Successful strategies and best practices identified by veteran practitioners include:

- Conduct outreach at school health clinics. Young Fathers of Santa Fe began doing this after visiting a teen health clinic to learn more about their services. They emphasized that the fatherhood program focused on keeping both parents in school. "You can get what you want by helping others get what they want," a program staff member reported.
- Use text messaging and social media for initial contacts. Many recruiters have found that it can be problematic to leave messages on home phone numbers for young fathers if the prospective participant still lives with his parents.

[67] Eisenberg, S. (2007). OFA Grantee Conference.

- Visit WIC centers where low-income women and couples enroll for government benefits. This has been a successful strategy for the Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo.
- Make presentations before local groups of OB/GYNs or midwives. It can be an effective approach to recruiting fathers.
- Help dads file taxes, search for employment and training opportunities, or address other practical needs before encouraging them to participate in a broad fatherhood program.
- Work with recognized names in the community to build program credibility, particularly for new programs. Consider asking local professional sports or political figures to publicly support a program, but be certain they exemplify the lifestyle the program intends to promote to fathers. Support can also be solicited from non-celebrity individuals who are known and respected in the community, such as a grandfather who coaches Little League or a young man who used to be a drug dealer but is now following a positive path.
- Partner with Head Start, Job Corps, or other local programs that are known for having an impact in the community.
- Recruit high-achieving program participants to deliver presentations at radio stations, schools, social service organizations, health fairs, and jails. The FATHER Project, a program of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota, does this, calling them Dadvocates or Citizen Fathers. These dads have the opportunity to help others based on what they have learned.
- Provide information on visitation, transfers, parole, and support programs for current and formerly incarcerated fathers and their families. The Osborne Association in New York City has a Family Resource Center with a toll-free hotline staffed by former prisoners and their family members to provide this information.[68]
- Partner with training programs. The Family Health and Education Institute recruits many of its participants from an urban automotive academy in Washington, DC. The institute delivers fatherhood services as the life skills portion of the curriculum for these men, most of whom are young fathers. The auto academy reports higher program completion and success rates since the start of the partnership.[69]
- Keep detailed statistics in simple databases to monitor recruitment efforts. The data will help in identifying the most effective strategies and may point to possible adjustments in personnel, approaches, or targeted groups and geographic areas.

[68] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, Responsible Fatherhood Technical Assistance Project. (2009). *How to implement promising practices: Peer guidance from the Responsible Fatherhood Program.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/how-implement-promising-practices-peer-guidance-responsible-fatherhood

[69] Ibid.

Effective Recruitment and Retention: The AIDA Model

At an OFA grantee roundtable, the facilitator presented a marketing model that features four components: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (AIDA). Roundtable participants gave the following examples of how this can work:

Attention (connect/relate/listen)

- Connect to what concerns fathers in the community.
- Use the latest research on the target market.
- Listen to fathers and other community members.
- Pump up the writing: don't be programmatic; use simple, direct, action words.
- Improve community visibility.
- Develop referral opportunities.
- Place signs in the community.
- Have staff in the community (e.g., talk to dads on street corners).
- Go to high schools to discuss parents' rights, responsibilities, and realities.

Interest (be relevant/provide examples/excite them)

- Speak about what concerns the target group.
- Provide examples and testimonials highlighting how others have benefited.
- Excite them and be encouraging. ("They don't hear many people say encouraging things.")
- Ask what they want for their children. They'll tell you, but they don't know how to achieve it.

Desire (stress benefits/"feel-good" factor/overcome objections)

- People want what makes them feel good.
- Be prepared to overcome objections. Provide examples of the experience of others.
- Explain how the program can help with child support and employment issues.

Action (demonstrate what is doable and worthwhile/get permission to follow up)

- Explain the benefits the target population can gain.
- Involve program graduates to spread the excitement.
- Inspire better staff performance.
- Go where dads are.
- Reach out to moms.
- Ask questions such as, "Do you want to protect your kids?" "Do you want to be better than your father?"
- Explain how "We'll help you break the pattern," but keep it real: "It can take a year and it's hard."[70]

[70] Smoot, B. (2009). OFA Grantee Roundtable facilitated discussion.

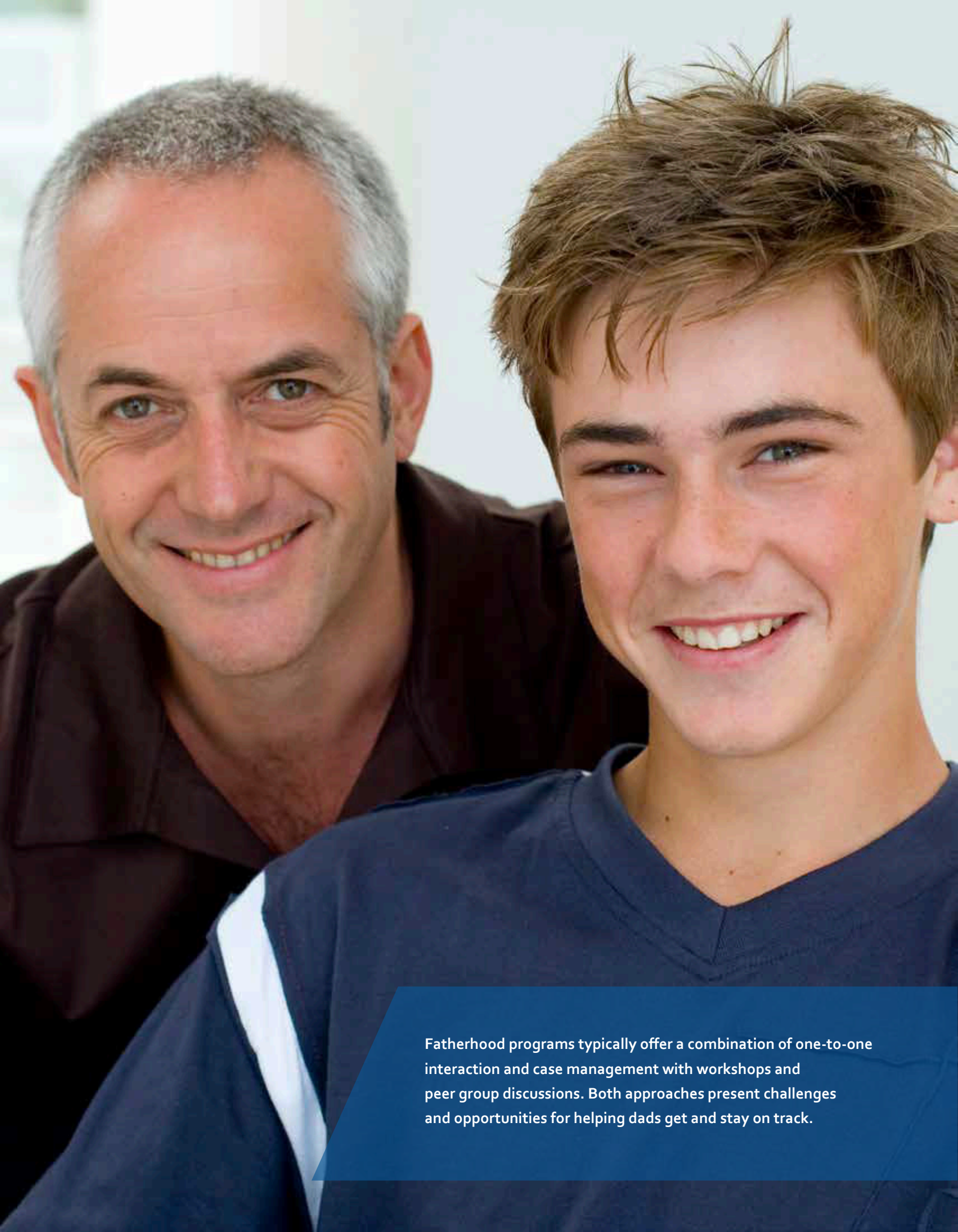
Top Takeaways

The following are some key considerations for outreach and recruitment activities to build or enhance a fatherhood program:

- Printed brochures and materials are an important part of a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy. Materials should be simple, easy to understand, and tailored to those the program wants to reach. The program's purpose and benefits should be clearly described. The format, graphics, language, tone, and reading level must be accessible and appealing to the target audience.
- A strong media strategy can include direct contact with reporters, strategic public service announcements, and columns or letters to the editor in newspapers and other publications.
- Hire recruitment staff or volunteers who can genuinely relate to the target population. Provide thorough training to ensure they are professional and responsive to the needs of potential participants, but also encourage them to act naturally and be themselves.
- Go to where the dads are, both physically in the community and online at Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Use text messaging to make initial contact with potential participants.
- Have conversations with men in diverse settings. Listen to what they have to say before offering anything. When describing their program, outreach and recruitment staff should make sure they respond to the current life needs of the potential participant.
- Reach out in multiple ways to reach more dads effectively.
- Providing meaningful services will not only increase retention, but also will become the program's best recruitment tool through word-of-mouth marketing.
- Thorough planning and skillful, caring staff are key to successful recruitment.
- Use training, education, and career services as recruitment tools.

Helpful Resources

- **Recruitment and Retention: Preparing for and Following up on Group Connections,** from Parents as Teachers, has tips on recruitment and developing solid outreach and follow-up efforts.
- **Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs** by James Levine, Dennis Murphy, and Sherrill Wilson, 1993.
- National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse developed and tested an outreach campaign—**Fatherhood Buzz**—to recruit men in barbershops.
- **Fathers and Parenting Interventions: What Works?** is a research brief from the Fatherhood Institute in the UK with tips on engagement of fathers in parent education and training.



Fatherhood programs typically offer a combination of one-to-one interaction and case management with workshops and peer group discussions. Both approaches present challenges and opportunities for helping dads get and stay on track.

> "The relationship is built by how you come across to the dads. At first, you want to spend 90% listening and 10% talking. Remember that you won't solve everything in a day or a week."
>
> Barry McIntosh,
> Young Fathers of Santa Fe

> "The first contact is most important. Don't say something like, 'I can't help you today. Come back tomorrow.' They won't come back."
>
> Patricia Littlejohn,
> South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families

Although many fatherhood program activities take place in group settings, critical work can also occur on a one-to-one basis. In fact, whether a father even decides to join a program can depend on the first one-to-one encounter with a staff member. One-to-one interaction and group activities both have important roles in helping fathers successfully complete a program. Workshops led by facilitators can generate tremendous positive energy among a group of fathers and influence retention. Similarly, the quality of individualized interaction and case management can affect how long a person stays in the program and whether he follows through in achieving his goals.

One-to-One Work

The first one-to-one participant-staff interaction typically takes place before enrollment. This conversation is generally informal and may be on the phone or in person at a teen health clinic, court proceeding, doctor's office, or street corner. No matter where it occurs, this conversation is likely to be crucial in a father's decision whether to get involved with a program. Preparing staff to engage in these conversations is critical to success. Staff members who work one-to-one with fathers should be aware of their own skills and limitations so they know when they can help a father directly or need to seek assistance from a colleague or partner agency with more specialized knowledge.

Experienced outreach workers emphasize the importance of listening and taking cues from the dad's comments. A father might speak about his need for a job to generate income so he can meet child support obligations, which presents an opportunity to discuss how the fatherhood program can help with employment as well as developing a stronger father-child relationship. Some men express frustrations about their relationships with the mothers of their children or the court system, which provides the opportunity to develop trust with fathers by listening to them carefully, empathizing with their situation, talking about co-parenting, and explaining how the program might be able to help them navigate the court system and improve their communication or presentation skills. Many practitioners agree on the importance of not overpromising what they or the program can deliver; ultimately, that will result in a loss of trust.

> **"It's important to maintain a non-judgmental approach and build a relationship from the start."**
>
> **Barry McIntosh,**
> **Young Fathers of Santa Fe**

> **"Participants must know that if they slip and fall, we've got them…they have to feel they belong."**
>
> **Joe Jones,**
> **Center for Urban Families**

The overall "feel" of a program can determine whether fathers stay or leave. Fatherhood practitioners agree that showing genuine concern and interest in establishing a long-term relationship are essential to creating trust. Listening carefully to figure out the father's needs, addressing urgent or initial needs, and always demonstrating honesty and trust are cited as essential skills for one-to-one work.

Many men who come to fatherhood programs struggle with depression and low morale as a result of life experiences and current circumstances. They have often felt rejected and let down by various institutions and programs. Many have not had loving, actively involved fathers in their lives. Therefore, helping dads identify and manage their emotions—anger, resentment, disappointment—can be a key component of successful one-to-one contact. "Try to get them out of the eye of the storm. Calm them down, slow them down, and help them to see things more objectively," one fatherhood program manager recommended.

> "Be responsive to guys and be willing to take some risks."
>
> Patricia Littlejohn,
> South Carolina Center
> for Fathers and Families

Case Managment

The following are key components of case management:

- **Build relationships** – Case management often involves a professional relationship grounded in trust that can provide effective support and accountability. Some programs conduct a rolling intake process in which case managers gather information gradually through informal discussion. The most important outcome of this process is to build a father's trust in the counselor or case manager. Counselors build trust by listening, remaining objective about a father's problems, and providing a supportive environment.

- **Assess needs** – Case managers usually conduct a needs assessment, but as one program staff member noted, "We don't use that term because it sounds like a clinical study." The goal is "to have frank, open conversations with the men we serve." Those discussions play a large part in determining the services they need. "We've had guys confess to having open warrants. We then set them up to have legal representation so they walk in protected."

- **Set goals** – Develop a realistic plan for the future to incorporate both short-term and long-term goals. Plans should document the goals and be updated frequently, both to document and foster progress toward future goals. "We often take the situation in bite-size pieces," one practitioner noted. If a father struggles to gain visitation rights or has trouble interacting with his child, a case manager can offer encouragement but suggest patience. "There is so much water under the bridge." A mom or a child "will have to see you acting differently" before their own behavior can change. "I try to de-emotionalize the situation and have them look at it differently."

- **Take a step-by-step approach** – Identify the action steps that will help the father reach his goals. For example, many fathers want a job or a better job to provide for their children, so case managers can take steps to assess the man's skills and interests. Young Fathers of Santa Fe follows a strategy in which fathers are given tasks to assess their capabilities: Does he know how to do a basic job search? What are his basic literacy skills? Many have no experience looking for a job. They may need help preparing a

resume or leaving a message on a potential employer's answering machine. Some will need a referral to an adult basic education program to develop their reading and writing skills. By assigning dads "little things to do" (e.g., writing a description of their general interests, preparing a list of jobs they have done, looking through online job listings, or practicing leaving a voice mail message), the program can more accurately assess needs, help fathers set attainable goals, and enable them to move forward.

- **Make referrals and follow up** – Programs cannot meet every need of a father through in-house services. Successful programs build on their understanding of the community and established partner relationships to address a father's needs and help him reach his goals. Effective referrals involve more than just providing a phone number. Case managers should, when able, directly introduce a father to the referral source. Additionally, staff should follow up with both the father and the referral source regarding progress. Some of the needs that might be addressed include housing, employment, substance abuse or misuse, child support, and visitation issues.

- **Promote self-esteem** – Even if they display a veneer of silent strength and toughness, many dads have low self-esteem that is reinforced if they are non-custodial parents. Young dads, in particular, often need a boost, especially if they face anger from the family of their child's mother. One program invites graduates back to speak to new participants. Other programs take current program participants, who are young dads themselves, to speak at pregnancy prevention classes in high schools. The presenters gain skills and confidence while new program participants or students hear from those who have dealt with a real-life problem.

- **Keep fathers on track** – Individualized activities help sustain men's lives and are an opportunity to develop a personalized strategic plan. But many dads are in danger of going "off course" through the normal routines of life. Being available to respond to crises and having regular one-to-one sessions can help keep men on course for success. These meetings are also an opportunity to refine or tweak goals and add new ones, depending on a dad's changing circumstances.

Case management

is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's and family's comprehensive needs through communication and available resources to promote quality, cost-effective outcomes.[71]

[71] Case Management Society of America. *What is a case manager?* https://cmsa.org/who-we-are/what-is-a-case-manager/

Working with fathers through home visits, the **Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo** in Texas uses an activity that asks dads what they want for their child. Men can choose from items such as good health, politeness, being good in school, excelling in sports, and other goals. When men rank the top three or four items on their wish list, staff can then focus discussion toward these goals. For example, if a dad of a newborn wants his child to be a good athlete, the counselor will encourage him to lie down on the floor with the baby on his stomach. The baby's act of raising his or her head supports muscular development. "It's an activity that builds kids' bodies for the future," one program case manager said. "Some dads think they just wait until a child is 14 to start working on athletics, but that's not the case."

One-to-one meetings require extensive planning by case managers. While strategic plans provide a focus for both the father and practitioner, one-to-one discussions often veer into new or unexpected areas. "Always make time for planning," one practitioner said. The long-range goal of such plans is to "deal with the cause of a crisis, not just the crisis of the week."

Maintaining accurate and up-to-date records is critical for effective case management. Using MIS software can make record keeping more efficient, allow for controlled access by other team members, and allow for more dynamic assessment of overall participant needs and engagement. Software systems come in many variations. Programs should carefully consider the costs, both initially and to maintain the system, and their needs and capacity before selecting one. The Center for Urban Families uses Efforts to Outcomes from Social Solutions to maintain its case management records.

Top Takeaways

The following are some key considerations in one-to-one work with dads:

- A dad's first impression of a fatherhood program and staff is a lasting one, and it is important to engage him from the start.
- Individual fathers usually face various challenges, not all of which will be apparent at the first or second encounter. Developing a relationship of trust and respect is important to ensure they actively seek help in dealing with particular issues.
- Offering advice and encouragement on identified issues and involving other staff members as necessary will help staff balance the help they provide to individual fathers. When appropriate, refer clients to services within or outside the program.

Once a trusting relationship is established, much of the one-to-one work involves assistance with a variety of life issues. These issues might relate to personal development, employment, legal problems, child support, parenting, relationships, or other challenges.

> "The basic goal was to help participants recognize and begin to change behavior and attitudes that were counterproductive to their progress." (p. 120)

> "Bob [group participant]: "I learned a lot … because there was a lot of things going on that I was holding in, and peer support would help me bring all them problems that I had in me, out." (p. 118)
>
> Johnson, Levine, & Doolittle[72]

Helpful Resources

- Teaching Important Parenting Skills: TIPS for Great Kids! can be used as an alternative to parenting classes or incorporated into group sessions. The toolkit provides research-based parenting information in a format that allows programs to incorporate parenting skills and information into existing services. More than 250 parenting tips are listed on 4" x 6" parenting tip cards on topics of interest to parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Topics are organized into 12 domains that research has shown to be important for child well-being. Some tips are designed specifically for fathers.

- Guidebook to the Responsible Fatherhood Project Participant Management Information System from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Office of Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs: A Toolkit for Cities from the National League of Cities provides information on uses for MIS; instructions for sourcing, implementing, and expanding an MIS; and information on leading commercial MIS vendors.

Group Work

In most fatherhood programs, group workshops are an efficient way to engage multiple men on issues of common concern, from navigating family relationships and establishing parent-child bonds to learning skills to help them take charge of their lives. When done effectively, group sessions are the "glue" that keeps men involved in a wider program and leads to powerful life changes for them and their families. Effective group programs are built on a foundation of trust that encourages self-reflection, personal sharing, peer support, and ongoing growth.

[72] Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers' fair share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood.* Russell Sage Foundation.

Facilitation

The success of peer support depends on the skills and dedication of peer facilitators and their ability to establish rapport with participants.[73] Facilitators should receive training in both general facilitation skills and the approach and content of the curricula.

Facilitators play four basic roles, and each role requires a slightly different set of skills:

1. *Engaging* – creating a welcoming and safe environment that draws participants in and encourages them to stay.

2. *Informing* – providing knowledge and information that is meaningful and useful to participants through a variety of approaches that engage and involve participants in the sharing of knowledge.

3. *Involving* – ensuring all group members are able to participate and benefit from the group activities and discussion.

4. *Applying* – allowing time for reflection about key takehome messages and encouraging the use of new awareness, knowledge, and skills to build stronger relationships and outcomes for children and families.[74]

Facilitators should know the subject matter and be able to establish credibility while drawing on group knowledge and recognizing they are not the only expert in the room. Preparation can make the difference between an engaging rap session and a successful group session focused on outcomes. In fact, veteran program managers recommend that facilitators spend at least twice as much time preparing as they do facilitating. Part of that preparation should involve a careful review of the purpose and goals for each session, as well as awareness of long-term goals for the group and the fatherhood program.

"If facilitators aren't doing a good job, pull them out. They can do harm."

Joe Jones,
Center for Urban Families

Features of POOR group facilitation:

- Insufficient preparation.
- Lack of purpose.
- Disorganization.
- Too much lecturing or dominating the conversation.
- Personal storytelling that is not relevant to group goals.
- Failure to manage problem group behaviors.
- A boring speaking style.
- Approach feels too much like school.
- Judgmental attitude.
- Projecting insincerity.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Brooks-Harris, J. E., & Stock-Ward, S. R. (1999). *Workshops: Designing and facilitating experiential learning.* Sage.

Effective facilitators focus on the journey of the group members and have a clear vision of the changes needed in their attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behavior. To successfully guide their participants, they:

- Create a safe and comfortable learning environment.
- Promote group interest and interaction through various types of activities.
- Encourage active participation and involve all group members.
- Keep things on track by being prepared, organized, and clear about the goals of group activities.
- Keep a focus on outcomes by encouraging development and application of new skills.

The most productive facilitators engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection and practice to hone their skills. Reviewing, sharing, and working on these strengths and growth areas with a co-facilitator, supervisor, or other colleague can strengthen their skills. Observing other facilitators in action is also beneficial.

Many fatherhood programs whose staff do not have strong group facilitation skills have contracted with individuals to provide workshops on a freelance basis rather than committing to a fulltime hire. It is important that any consultants, part-time staff, and/or volunteers work closely with full-time program staff to ensure they have adequate time for preparation, meet the needs of the group, and focus on program goals.

Stages of Group Development

Workshop facilitators should not expect men to start sharing and supporting each other immediately. All groups go through various stages of development.[75]

Forming – Everything seems new and participants are often wary and unsure. The role of the facilitator is important as he or she uses "engaging" skills to create a welcoming environment, provide guidance and direction, and establish that the group is safe for sharing information.

[75] Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6): 384–99.

Storming – Participants begin to get comfortable sharing in the group, but there is still uncertainty and unfamiliarity with the group process. Group members open up to each other and may confront each other's ideas and perspectives. The facilitator's ability to listen and deal with conflict or competition is essential in helping the group move forward.

Norming – The group coalesces around common goals, shares a sense of group belonging, and embraces group process and mutual support. Some members may have attained "a-ha" moments that signify new, deeper learning.

Performing – The group becomes more task oriented and comfortable solving problems. Most members will be aware of key take-home messages as the facilitator sometimes takes a back seat while the group dominates the proceedings.

Adjourning – This is one of the most difficult stages. After creating a meaningful group experience for members, the facilitator must prepare them for the end of the group. Successful facilitators conduct an array of interesting and engaging activities to encourage participation and reflection, provide relevant take-home messages, and continuously challenge dads to apply their knowledge in new, tangible ways.

Engaging Participants

Fatherhood programs employ many strategies to ensure participant engagement.

Opening and closing rituals – Adopting rituals to begin and end each session provides a sense of familiarity and comfort that is useful during early group development. Providing food, playing music, or simply allowing time for informal conversation as group members arrive can serve as an opening ritual. Some groups always end with a closing ritual such as a group hug or a quick "whip" around the room for final thoughts.

As groups reach the norming and performing stages, rituals can be used more purposefully to further learning and encourage application of skills. Some programs begin their group sessions with a checkin, sometimes called "yos and nos," where participants have the opportunity to share their experiences between sessions. This strategy helps facilitators learn how participants are doing in applying new skills and knowledge. By allowing time at the end of group sessions for reflection on key takeaway messages, facilitators encourage participants to use some of their new skills at home and be ready to report back at the next session.

Talking and sharing – One fatherhood program uses an activity called I-Cards, in which universal symbols such as a bird in flight, a broken heart, or a ladder are cut out and attached to 3" x 5" cards and spread out on a table. The facilitator asks participants to pick out a few of the cards, talk about why they picked the cards, and how the symbols relate to their situations. "This is a way to get a deep discussion in a short amount of time," a case manager said.

Icebreaker – One popular icebreaker activity is to ask dads, "How do you want to be remembered as a parent?" This activity can get them talking about how they remember their own parents and grandparents, and it can help them take greater ownership of parenting responsibilities.

Role-play – Role-playing can help fathers see issues from a different perspective. It can also break down barriers and produce teachable moments to help men navigate difficult situations or relationships. If properly used, role-playing can also include humor that breaks down barriers and helps build trust.

Building trust – Using a dad's story, gained through one-to-one conversation, as an anonymous case study is a strategy that can build trust with the father and generate conversation and problem-solving. The dad's identity is always kept confidential. "I tell them I will never talk behind their back," a program manager said.

Peer-to-peer learning – The Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo in Texas schedules a father-and-child play group with activity stations where men can learn from each other. In this way, a dad with a 6-month-old child might learn something from watching another dad interact with a 2-year-old. "It's informal but still has some structure," a practitioner said. The program also invites moms to the session, which is an opportunity for a woman to see the father act in a new, more attentive way toward his child. "If they see the father learning to interact with the baby, it can be important in developing a stronger mom-dad relationship."

Managing Problem Behaviors

Despite effective facilitation, problem behaviors in groups can undermine success and present communication problems. The facilitator's role is to listen carefully and pay attention to verbal and nonverbal cues to pick up on problems.

One way to avoid problems is to clearly state session rules and expectations. These ground rules, described by one experienced practitioner as a group agreement, should reflect the consensus of group members. In fact, many groups begin to self-regulate as members refer each other to the ground rules.

However, a facilitator might face challenges from a group member who tests the leader's authority during early sessions. Facilitators need to be confident in their ability to be credible and create a safe environment for group discussion.

Facilitators often confront three common types of problem behaviors:

The Monopolizer – Almost every group has someone who talks too much. While this person may have good information to share, letting him talk continually will generate resentment within the group and jeopardize its success. Referring back to the ground rules is one strategy for facilitators. Use phrases such as "share the time" and "allow all voices to be heard." Facilitators can also respond with comments such as, "Thanks for sharing. Can we hear from someone else?" or "Has anyone else had a similar experience?"

A strong facilitator will monitor the rest of the group and directly ask for other input, politely interrupt the monopolizer, or summarize the information. A good rule of thumb is to limit each person to no more than two or three answers per session. Another strategy is to use a "talking stick" that is passed around the group. Only the person holding the stick can speak at that time. Avoiding eye contact with

the monopolizer can also reduce his tendency to dominate the conversation. If these actions are not successful, the facilitator may need to talk directly with the person at session breaks to remind him that everyone must have an opportunity to share ideas.

The Quiet Participant – Some people talk a lot, but others talk little or not at all. Try to reverse the roles of the monopolizer and the quiet participant. Encourage monopolizers to share the time and quiet people to speak up when they have something to say. Some people are just shy or embarrassed about giving a "wrong" answer. A facilitator can encourage input by making eye contact with the quiet participant and supporting his contribution. Calling on individuals to speak or using small group activities are other ways to involve quieter members in the group discussion.

Side Conversations – Side conversations occur in most workshops and may or may not relate to the session content. Side discussions should not intrude on the workshop. Some facilitators will lower their voices or just stop talking when they hear such a conversation. As soon as the room is quiet, the side conversation usually ends. By stopping to listen, the facilitator might recognize that the conversation is relevant to the group's topic and will encourage the individuals to share their discussion with the entire group. If the conversation is not relevant to the discussion, facilitators can remind the individuals of the ground rules and the need to respect the group process. It may also be a sign that the group needs to take a break.

Working With a Co-Facilitator

A co-facilitator, male or female, can also help manage problem behaviors, with the person located just "off stage" to monitor participant activity. Two facilitators are useful for a group of more than 20 individuals. Organizations can also match co-facilitators based on their skill sets and approaches; for example, a team might include someone particularly effective at engaging and involving participants with a partner skilled at informing and applying skills. Fatherhood groups sometimes rely on a male-female team of co-facilitators for various reasons, including the opportunity to model respectful male-female interaction.

Yet co-facilitation will not always work. Program managers should observe facilitators in action and encourage a team to recognize each other's strengths and growth areas. Also, allow joint planning time before a group session and a debriefing afterward. Decide whether one facilitator should be the lead or if they will share this role. Cofacilitators should discuss beforehand how to resolve conflicts or disagreements that may arise during discussion. Developing a system of signals to communicate with each other will help ensure that goals are met and activities are adapted as needed.

Top Takeaways

The following are some key considerations in group work with dads:

- Facilitators play four basic roles: engaging, informing, involving, and applying (actively encouraging participants to apply program lessons in their daily lives).
- Opening and closing rituals can be effective tools. To encourage application of knowledge and skills, make time at the beginning and end of each group session for reflection on takeaway messages and discussing how participants can integrate the lesson into their lives.
- Effective facilitators offer varied activities, respond to individual group member needs, listen to and learn from the group, and manage difficult people.
- Role-play activities, talking and sharing, and peer-to-peer learning are three ways to engage participants during group sessions.
- Identify problems in group dynamics early and intervene as needed to ensure everyone can participate in discussions.

Helpful Resources

- *Workshops: Designing and Facilitating Experiential Learning* by J. E. Brooks-Harris and S. R. Stock-Ward (1999) identifies the four basic roles played by facilitators and the required skill sets for each. This publication features a self-assessment that can be helpful in identifying strengths and areas for improvement.
- Working with Fathers in Groups: Tips to Enhance Your Facilitation Skills is a 2009 National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse webinar that discussed tips for group workshops.
- Facilitation Skills – Self-Assessment can help individuals assess their skills on a 5-point Likert scale based on topics such as engaging, involving, informing, and applying skills.
- The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse has developed a Compendium of Curricula Used by Fatherhood Programs.

> **"Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior in which one person attempts to control another through threats or actual use of physical violence, sexual assault, verbal and psychological abuse, and/or economic coercion."**
>
> **Juan Carlos Arean, Futures Without Violence**[76]

> **"Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner."**
>
> **Karen Wilson, Safe Place**[77]

> **"If no one in your groups is talking about it [domestic violence], you're not addressing it."**
>
> **Lisa Nitsch, House of Ruth Maryland**[78]

Addressing Domestic Violence

"Two essential tasks for responsible fatherhood programs are:
1) Motivate men who batter to seek help;
2) Educate men who are at risk of battering partners or children."
Fernando Mederos, Massachusetts Department of Children and Families[79]

Domestic violence is a serious problem affecting families and communities. One in five women experience domestic violence sometime in their lives,[80] and more than 15 million children suffer the trauma of witnessing domestic violence each year.[81] The short-term effects of witnessing such violence can include behavioral and physical health problems. Long-term effects can include alcohol and drug problems and the creation of a cycle of violence that spans generations.[82] Men can also be victims of domestic assault in heterosexual or gay relationships. However, national studies point out that most domestic violence involves women as victims and males as batterers. Additionally, women who are victims are more likely than men to be injured or afraid of their partners.[83] Fatherhood programs have the opportunity to motivate participants to empathize with girls and women, while the fathers themselves can play an important role in socializing children and influencing other fathers to be aware of the impact domestic violence can have on individuals and families.

[76] Arean, J. C. (Presenter). (2007, April 18). *Batterers prevention and intervention services for fatherhood programs.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/batterers-prevention-and-intervention-services-fatherhood-programs-nrfc

[77] Wilson, K. (Presenter). (2010, April 20). *Beyond the protocol: Domestic and intimate partner intervention.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/beyond-protocol-domestic-and-intimate-partner-violence-intervention-nrfc

[78] Nitsch, L. (Presenter). (2008, October 21). *The role of fatherhood programs in addressing domestic violence.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/role-fatherhood-programs-addressing-domestic-violence-nrfc-webinar

[79] Mederos, F. (Presenter). (2010, April 20). *Beyond the protocol: Domestic and intimate partner intervention.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/beyond-protocol-domestic-and-intimate-partner-violence-intervention-nrfc

[80] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). *The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2010 summary report.* http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_executive_summary-a.pdf

[81] Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). *Domestic violence: A primer for child welfare professionals.* https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/domestic-violence/

[82] Wolfe, D. A., Crooks, C. V., Lee, V., McIntyre-Smith, A., & Jaffe, P. (2003). The effects of children's exposure to domestic violence: A meta-analysis and critique. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 6, 171-187; Dickson, M. (Writer), & Castro, C, (Director). (1998). *No safe place: Violence against women.* [Discussion questions from television series]. Public Broadcasting Service. http://www.pbs.org/kued/nosafeplace/studyg/domestic.html

[83] Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence: Findings from the national violence against women survey.* U.S. Department of Justice. Belknap, J., & Melton, H. (2005). *Are heterosexual men also victims of intimate partner abuse?* National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, 1-12. https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/AR_MaleVictims.pdf; Archer, J. (2000). Sex differences in aggression between heterosexual partners: A metaanalytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 651-680.

Fatherhood programs are not specifically interventions for abusers or domestic violence prevention programs, but they can play an important role in improving behaviors among men and fathers. Although many fathers have never been violent toward a partner, programs should work diligently to identify any safety risks and ensure that staff are trained to recognize signs of domestic violence. All fatherhood programs can address domestic violence and promote safe environments for children and families in several key ways:

- Establish partnerships with local domestic violence organizations to share clear goals and objectives.
- Work with a domestic violence prevention partner to create a protocol to ensure mutual understanding of domestic violence issues and guide service delivery.
- Facilitate cross-training for fatherhood and domestic violence agency staff.
- Offer education and awareness-building activities to engage program participants in preventing domestic violence and motivating batterers to seek help.

> **"Parental conflict is one of the strongest predictors of childhood problems … An alarming statistic published by the US Department of Justice indicates that 1 in 15 children are exposed to intimate partner violence every single year, and that in 90% of those cases children are eyewitnesses to this violence. These children pay the price with higher rates of aggression, substance use, criminal involvement, suicide attempts, mental health problems, and chronic health conditions.[84]**

> **Men need to join the conversation about male violence and refuse to stand silently by while too many wives, daughters, sisters, and grandmothers live in the constant fear and pain of domestic violence." [85]**

[84] Caringdads.org. (2017).

[85] Batten, R. (2009, April 24). Time to end violence against women. *The Denver Post*. http://www.denverpost.com/Opinion/ci_12211882/Time-to-end-violence-against-women

Partnerships with Domestic Violence Prevention Organizations

> **"Those who have learned to work together know that when they do so they are each more effective, and everyone wins—especially the children."** [86]

> **"Although each of these fields has developed an expertise that comes from years of providing community services and advocacy, [domestic violence] advocates and [fatherhood] practitioners may not understand the fundamental perspective of each other's work."** [87]

Responsible fatherhood programs and domestic violence service providers have not traditionally worked together. However, experienced fatherhood practitioners now recognize the importance of ongoing relationships with abuser intervention programs and victim support organizations. Building these relationships may take considerable time and perseverance because of philosophical differences and misunderstandings between the agencies. Common misperceptions are that all fatherhood programs advocate for and emphasize fathers' rights, while all domestic violence prevention advocates believe that men identified as batterers cannot change. Through constructive dialogue, such misperceptions can be cleared up and understanding of mutual goals can grow.

[86] Ooms, T., Boggess, J., Menard, A., Myrick, M., Roberts, P., Tweedie, J., & Wilson, P. (2006), *Building bridges between healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood, and domestic violence programs.* Center for Law and Social Policy and National Conference of State Legislatures, p. 9.

[87] Boggess, J., & Groblewski, J. (2011). *Safety and services: Women of color speak about their communities.* https://cffpp.org/wp-content/uploads/Safety_and_Services.pdf, p. 4.

Discussions about external factors such as poverty, racial discrimination, and gender oppression can be the foundation for shared goals such as:

- Tackling economic barriers and stressors experienced by men and women with low incomes.
- Raising awareness of the impact of socialization on male and female gender roles.
- Acknowledging the effect of racism and gender oppression on individuals and couples.
- Acknowledging the impact of violence on individuals, families, and communities.
- Working with men to raise awareness of the impact of gender oppression and violence and show how it complicates their lives.
- Helping men and women enhance their parenting and relationship skills, focusing on the messages they send their children.
- Involving men as allies in preventing violence and promoting nonviolence.
- Reducing the incidence of violence in families and communities.
- Developing and displaying messages that promote nonviolence and healthy relationships.
- Improving outcomes for all family members.

Thinking about long-term goals helps fatherhood practitioners have meaningful discussions with local domestic violence agencies and explore how a partnership can be mutually beneficial. But first, fatherhood practitioners should recognize that women and families served by domestic violence prevention agencies often have experienced harmful or lethal abuse at the hands of intimate partners. Showing understanding and empathy, in addition to explaining the limited opportunities available to many fathers with low incomes, can pave the way for lasting partnerships.

Experienced practitioners note that although male victims should have support, it should not minimize or deflect attention from the problem of men's violence against women. One approach offered by ramesh kathanadhi of Men Stopping Violence, a national training institute that helps mobilize men to prevent violence against women and girls, is to point out that male victims may experience violence in partnerships with women or with men. Acknowledging that domestic violence occurs in same gender relationships (between men and between women) can help avoid pitting male victims against female victims and "de-gender" the issue of domestic violence.

Programs funded through federal Promoting Responsible Fatherhood grants and many other fatherhood programs are required by their funding sources to work with domestic violence prevention partners. These programs should consider initiating subcontract agreements that cover costs associated with partners' time and effort.

As fatherhood programs talk to potential partners, they should:

- Emphasize their unique access to men in the community, which creates an opportunity to inform and educate.
- Outline the strategies they use to raise awareness and help prevent violence.
- Acknowledge they are not an abuser intervention program and show they understand the importance of making referrals to intervention programs.
- Demonstrate support for the domestic violence prevention agency's community initiatives by attending events such as Take Back the Night rallies, hosting donation drives, and encouraging men to volunteer.[88]

Fatherhood practitioners also should be willing to listen to, and learn from, their domestic violence prevention agency partners. Partners can help fatherhood practitioners understand and confirm for staff and participants that:

- Violence is never acceptable.
- Anger management is not an appropriate treatment for batterers.
- A pep talk or positive peer pressure does not stop a pattern of abuse.

Once you have established common ground, you can explore how to work together in tangible ways, such as creating protocols, providing cross-training, and establishing cross-referral procedures.

In Effective Partnerships, Fatherhood Programs and Domestic Violence Prevention Agencies:

- Recognize they have separate functions but find ways to work together.
- Provide complementary services toward mutual goals.
- Host cross-trainings for each other's staff.
- Share cross-referrals.
- Work together to create standard operating procedures for both agencies.
- Have ongoing case consultations and partnership development meetings.

[88] Nitsch, L. (2013, November 1). *Shifting the discussion about domestic violence in fatherhood programs: From required burden to real value added.* Presented at the Delaware Devoted Dads conference.

Spotlight on...

Changing Attitudes and Behaviors

Men Stopping Violence helps men identify their experiences with violence as children and take responsibility for healing from them. This approach can help men cultivate better relationships with their children and empathize with their children's mother in ways that strengthen their co-parenting. One man who attended a Men Stopping Violence workshop recognized that his behavior toward his ex-wife was controlling and aggressive, making it harder for her to co-parent and for him to connect with his child. Through what he learned at the workshop, he took responsibility for his behavior, which improved his relationships with his former partner and son.

Possible Guiding Principles for Partnering Agencies[89] *from the Colorado Department of Human Services:*

- We recognize that domestic violence is a complex, serious, and pervasive problem throughout our community. The use of physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional violence, as well as the use of power and control in an intimate relationship, undermines the development of responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships.
- We will ensure that all staff and volunteers convey a strong message to the community and program participants that violence or abusive or coercive behavior is unacceptable in any situation, including intimate relationships, and that violence is never an appropriate response to conflict.
- We will provide services to fathers in a manner consistent with promoting the safety and well-being of fathers, mothers, and children.
- We believe that all people are entitled to the right to live free from violence or threat of violence from current or former partners. To end the cycle of domestic violence, services will be offered to victims and perpetrators, with victim safety being a priority.
- We will take care not to disparage or compromise the efforts and successes of single parents.
- We recognize the diversity of the community and the importance of providing culturally appropriate approaches to developing responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships in families. Cultural competency is critical to understanding families and their relationships, and to providing services and supports that are meaningful and relevant. We will respect the unique cultural identities, experiences, and circumstances of individuals, couples, and families.
- We recognize that promoting the development of healthy relationships with children and intimate partners incorporates "it's only healthy if it's safe."
- We believe that individuals in healthy relationships do not engage in violent, abusive, or coercive behavior.
- We will make every effort to ensure that disclosures of abuse remain confidential, except in circumstances prescribed by law, professional standards, or ethical protocol.
- We will conduct screening for domestic violence in a consistent and diligent manner and ensure staff have been trained.
- We recognize current research and experiential evidence that domestic violence typically involves a male abusing a female partner. All screening and assessment processes and procedures will reflect this evidence but will be mindful of circumstances involving male victims and female perpetrators.

[89] Colorado Department of Human Services. (2006). *Domestic violence protocol guide.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/colorado-department-human-services-domestic-violence-protocol-guide

Protocols to Guide Service Delivery

> **"In the context of promoting responsible fatherhood, a well-structured domestic violence protocol ensures that domestic violence issues within families targeted by the program are safely, routinely, and consistently identified, appropriately addressed, and that adequate supports and safeguards are in place for families dealing with domestic violence."** [90]

Every fatherhood program should have a protocol to detail how it addresses domestic violence. This protocol can:

- Demonstrate program and partner staff understanding of domestic violence and its impact on children and families.
- Outline strategies for influencing attitudes and behavior of program participants.
- Describe approaches that show respect to mothers and encourage positive co-parenting.

Fatherhood programs also should consider how they will identify male victims and which partner agencies might be able to provide supportive services for men.

> **"Protocol development will be most meaningful if it occurs within the context of a collaborative partnership developed with domestic violence programs."** [91]

A protocol should cover many or all of the following:

- List of key project partners.
- Project description and goals.
- Scope and purpose of protocol.
- Underlying principles and shared values.
- Definition of domestic violence.
- Screening for domestic violence.
- Information provided to and exchanged with referring partners.
- Responding to disclosures of abuse by victims or abusers.
- Victim confidentiality protections and limitations (e.g., mandated reporting if child abuse has occurred).
- Fatherhood program strategy to address domestic violence.
- Cross-training on responsible fatherhood and domestic violence issues.
- Procedures for review of protocols, cases, and partnership.

[90] Colorado Department of Human Services. (2006). *Domestic violence protocol guide.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/colorado-department-human-services-domestic-violence-protocol-guide

[91] Menard, A. (2007). *Developing domestic violence protocols.* National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Developing-Domestic-Violence.pdf, p. 6.

A protocol also should recognize:

- Domestic violence is harmful to children in multiple ways, including their safety, development, and relationships with both parents.
- Fathers are important to children and affect their children, for better or worse.
- Despite a commitment to education and prevention, responsible fatherhood programs are not abuse intervention programs or domestic violence prevention programs. These tasks are appropriate for other community agencies.
- Fatherhood programs should have solid relationships with domestic violence prevention agencies in their communities that offer access to victim resources and formal screening procedures to ensure attention to family safety.
- Fatherhood programs should have referral relationships with community services for men who batter.
- Fatherhood program staff should receive orientation and annual refresher training on domestic violence to ensure they respond with sensitivity and know when and how to make referrals.
- Fatherhood programs should have mechanisms to allow fathers and other family members to report or self-report domestic violence issues without shame.
- Responsible fatherhood groups should promote prevention by educating men at risk of battering partners and children, plus intervention by motivating men who batter to seek help. They also should engage program participants who are not violent with their partners or children to promote nonviolence.

> **"Along with creation of protocols, developing a screening tool is one of the most difficult collective tasks of the partnership. Sometimes, what they learn in their cross-training and Domestic Violence 101 trainings does not prepare fatherhood service providers for the terms and conditions of the screening tools suggested by their Domestic Violence partners, which may not always be culturally or situationally appropriate for programs for low-income men of color. Potential partners should be prepared for this possibility."**
>
> **Jacquelyn Boggess, Center for Family Policy and Practice**

Screening

A protocol should cover how a program intends to screen for domestic violence that may be affecting families served. The program protocol should describe the process clearly so staff can be trained in the approach and have a resource to clarify issues that may arise.

Some programs use formal screening tools, some rely on a more informal screening process, and many use a combination of the two approaches. The process might be different depending on whether a program is working solely with a father or also has contact with his children, the mother of his children, and/or his current partner. If you can ask questions and observe the behaviors of multiple family members, you have more opportunity to detect any warning signs; however, well trained staff can assess responses to questions and pick up other clues when working with just one partner. Experienced practitioners understand the importance of treating all participants with respect and emphasize that participants are more likely to disclose incidents or patterns of violence after enrolling and as trust is established.

Basic screening tools have certain limitations; for example, terms like "abuse" or "domestic violence" may not be readily understood. Experts advise against being too responsive or alarmist as that may scare people away from services. Fernando Mederos of the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families recommends using culturally sensitive and gender-neutral language to ensure accurate information is obtained. For instance, men who have suffered intimate partner violence are more likely to report "incidents of violence" than they are to identify or disclose themselves as "victims."

Many programs use formal intake screening tools that include questions such as, "When you and your partner argue, does your partner ever show or express fear about your behavior?" and "Have your children ever witnessed arguing or fighting between you and your current or former partner?" One state agency asks parents about their own behavior and their partner's behavior during arguments. Questions tap whether they have felt threatened physically, been intimidated or humiliated by a current or past partner, had insults directed at them by the partner, or had personal belongings destroyed. If respondents answer "yes" to any question, they are asked if they would like to talk to someone about these behaviors.

A more informal screening approach allows men to open up gradually and offer more information about violence in their lives as they feel more comfortable with and trust fatherhood program staff. One experienced practitioner recommends programs begin by asking dads whether they feel safe in their communities and whether their lives have been affected by violence. By asking about violence in their community, fatherhood practitioners can raise the idea that all individuals have a right to feel safe, including an ex-partner. "We want to help men see their partner or ex-partner as a human being, whether they like her or not," said one expert. "We have a general conversation about how everyone has a right to be safe from violence, and eventually we can get into more specifics."

> **"Self-awareness can be supported by asking all men to reflect on their own behaviors—both in the program intake process and through workshops. Making self-reflection a cultural expectation of your program is a great way to build trust with Domestic Violence agencies in your community. This self-assessment can help reframe 'normal' behavior as harmful, and help build empathy with women's experiences of men's behavior."**
>
> **ramesh kathanadhi, Men Stopping Violence**

Staff Training

Fatherhood programs have a fundamental responsibility to:

- Educate and train staff to recognize signs of domestic violence.
- Identify situations where interventions or referrals are appropriate.
- Understand how to respond to disclosures of perpetration and victimization.
- Work with fathers to raise awareness and encourage non-violent behavior.

All staff should consistently and clearly demonstrate that violence is unacceptable in parenting and family relationships and is never an appropriate response to conflict. Some staff, particularly male staff, may not have any prior domestic violence training or might be uncomfortable with the subject. All staff should complete training to ensure the program is equipped to address the issue frankly. Many programs successfully train staff by using the same curricula, materials, or activities that participants experience. This approach enables self-reflection and recognition of any personal "baggage," understanding of key messages designed for participants, and practice of recommended skills.

> **"The only way to ask others to grow is to demonstrate that you are also engaged in a self-improvement process."**
>
> **Ted Strader, COPES**

> **"Anger management is a 'pop psychology' term … most abusive partners are masters at managing their anger … there is an assumption of respect and equality that is missing in violent relationships."**
>
> **Lisa Nitsch, House of Ruth Maryland**

Domestic violence training for fatherhood staff typically focuses on:

- Understanding that domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that includes physical violence and non-physical abuse, such as verbal and psychological abuse or economic coercion.
- Acknowledging the role of sexism and traditional male socialization in the complicated problems of domestic violence.
- Providing an opportunity for reflection on personal family history.
- Discussing the importance of appropriate community responses, including that of fatherhood programs, in creating safety for children, women, and families.
- Recognizing signs that domestic violence may be present in a relationship.
- Implementing and using a formal domestic violence screening tool and/or conducting an informal screening procedure at various stages of the program and capturing information in case notes.
- Identifying situations where interventions or referrals are appropriate.
- Preparing staff to respond to disclosures of perpetration and victimization.
- Knowing who to refer cases to.
- Responding to potential victims or abusers in a supportive, not shaming, way.
    - Staff could role-play responses to a father who discloses abusive behavior, helping him acknowledge his actions and be accountable.
    - If a father indicates he has been a victim of violence in a gay or heterosexual relationship, staff could practice supportive ways to acknowledge his experience.
- Facilitating interactive activities with fathers to:
    - Demonstrate the impact of violence on children and families.
    - Build knowledge of non-violent parenting and relationship skills.
    - Encourage involvement as role models to reduce and prevent incidents of domestic violence.
- Discussing healthy masculinity in ways that consider:
    - The positive side of traditional male socialization.
    - What it means to be a man in the context of healthy intimate relationships and parenting.

> "Men Stopping Violence has learned that sometimes men who seem to be our closest allies are privately perpetrating abuse toward their partners. Conversely, we've found that men who come to us looking to be accountable for their abusive behavior have become some of the most committed and effective advocates for men creating safer communities for women and girls."
>
> Lee Giordano, Men Stopping Violence

Some training sessions should include domestic violence agency partners so fatherhood staff have an overview of their approaches and objectives, hear the perspectives of victims and advocates, and understand the importance of encouraging and helping fathers internalize non-violent messages. Training with partner agency staff also should help ensure that they appreciate the barriers (poverty, unemployment, discrimination, violence) that men in fatherhood programs often face and understand the program's goals and methods. Partner agency staff should understand the value of the fatherhood program in raising awareness, changing behavior, and encouraging nonviolence. Some programs incorporate a panel of women or video or written materials to effectively bring in the perspectives of women to show their support of men in the local community.

Experienced practitioners report that at least 10 to 15 percent of participants in fatherhood programs have a history of abuse with their partners or children and some were victims of abuse either as children or adults. Staff training can cover how to spot various warning signs. The National Fatherhood Initiative's domestic violence awareness materials (designed for direct work with fathers, but useful for staff training) indicate that warning signs of domestic abuse may be found in a person who:

- Looks and acts in ways that cause fear.
- Acts with jealousy and possessiveness and accuses a partner of infidelity.
- Tries to control how a partner spends their time, who they see, and who they talk to.
- Wants a partner to ask permission to make everyday decisions.
- Blames others for wrongdoings.
- Uses intimidation by destroying property.
- Threatens a partner with violence or a weapon.
- Uses insults, profanity, and name calling to put down the partner.
- Cannot take criticism and always justifies own actions.

In addition to raising awareness of warning signs, staff training should include tips for fathers.
The White Ribbon Campaign of men working to end men's violence against women offers positive steps men can take:

- Educate your children about healthy equal relationships.
- Accept your role as a man promoting gender equality.
- Listen to women and learn from women.
- Be a good role model.
- Demonstrate that you value women as equals and believe in healthy relationships.
- Do not laugh at sexist jokes or otherwise objectify women.
- Speak of the men and women who made a difference in your life.
- Speak out about violence against women and other injustices.

Similarly, the National Fatherhood Initiative suggests the following non-violent strategies for fathers:

- Valuing the opinions of others.
- Expressing empathy.
- Being emotionally affirming.
- Accepting responsibility for one's actions.
- Communicating openly and truthfully.
- Being a positive and non-violent role model for the children.
- Sharing parental responsibilities.
- Sharing equal responsibility in household financial decisions.
- Being willing to compromise and resolve disagreements in a mutually satisfying manner.

Education and Awareness Building Activities for Program Participants

> **"Engage men where they are at. Help them to move beyond their comfort level and work through defensiveness about this issue … Use concrete interactive activities and exercises.Keep the focus on the kids. Responsible fathers model a non-violent lifestyle."**
>
> **Tyler Osterhaus, Weld County (Colorado) Department of Human Services[92]**

> **"Provide a forum in which to develop positive attitudes towards women."**
>
> **Johnny Rice, Maryland Department of Human Resources[93]**

> **"Many men, even those who are not identified as abusive, use abusive behavior. An important role of fatherhood programs can be in transforming harmful norms around masculinity and encouraging men who acknowledge their use of abusive behavior to become better allies in spreading the word about the practice of non-violence."**
>
> **ramesh kathanadhi, Men Stopping Violence[94]**

Berkowitz et al. suggest providing opportunities for men to share their feelings and concerns about domestic violence and focusing on "the development of empathy for victims, learning the meaning of consent, reducing bystander behavior, and re-imagining what it means to be male." They emphasize that "work with young men and boys is particularly critical for changing social norms regarding relationships and violence against women." [95] Similarly, Tony Porter, co-founder of A Call to Men, recommends giving men the opportunity to reflect on the impact of male socialization: *"Men are socialized to see less value in women, treat women as property, and objectify women … [so it's hardly surprising that] this leads to violence against women."* [96]

Experienced practitioners recommend treating men with respect, allowing time for them to process new information, and being cautious about shaming or confronting them when they make disclosures. Some practitioners bring up domestic violence by asking questions such as, "How do you want your children to remember you?" or "What messages about relationships did you get from your parents?" Others point out that you can help men reflect on their behavior through questions such as, "How do I treat people around me?" "Are there ways in which I am controlling or abusive?" "Do I support sexism by laughing at sexist jokes?" Fernando Mederos, who has worked with numerous agencies in Massachusetts and other states, suggests asking questions such as, "Do you ever give her orders, act angry, ignore her, yell at her, put her down, call her names, belittle her, or make fun of her in front of the children?" Mederos points out that questions like these can lead men to recognize the importance of showing respect for mothers and encourage fathers to acknowledge that "what you do will stay with your children … you cannot disrespect or hurt their mother without hurting your children." [97]

[92] Osterhaus, T. (Presenter). (2010, April 20). *Beyond the protocol: Domestic and intimate partner violence prevention.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/beyond-protocol-domestic-and-intimate-partner-violence-intervention-nrfc

[93] Rice, J. (Presenter). (2008, October 21). *The role of fatherhood programs in addressing domestic violence.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/role-fatherhood-programs-addressing-domestic-violence-nrfc-webinar

[94] Kathanadhi, R. (Presenter). (2014, April 16). *Addressing domestic violence: The role of fatherhood programs.* [Webinar]. https://fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/addressing-domestic-violence-role-fatherhood-programs-nrfc-webinar

[95] Berkowitz, A., Jaffe, P., Peacock, D., Rosenbluth, B., & Sousa, C. (2012). *Young men as allies in preventing violence and abuse.* https://engagingmen.futureswithoutviolence.org/campaign-materials/working-with-specific-populations/articles/young-men-as-allies-in-preventing-violence-and-abuse/

[96] Porter, T. (Presenter). (2011, August 16). *Taking the domestic violence conversation to the community.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/taking-domestic-violence-conversation-community-nrcf-webinar

[97] Mederos, F. (2012, June 5). Interview.

Keep the Conversation Going[98]

- Use shaming and confrontation cautiously because they may cause shutdown or defensiveness.
- Treat fathers with respect and hopeful expectation.
- Emphasize the dignity of being a man and a father, including the discipline and dedication required.
- Be prepared to work over the long term and through broad community partnerships.
- Allow the men to speak and share stories.
- Find out what their needs are and know their struggles and suffering; many men suffer from unacknowledged and unprocessed trauma from childhood.
- Use empathic listening and motivational interviewing to guide and cultivate self-discovery.
- Help men talk about women without complaining or being demeaning, demystify female characteristics, talk about similarities and differences, educate men about the historical oppression of women and women's current struggle for equality and human rights around the globe.

Men Stopping Violence uses a Violent and Controlling Behaviors List to help men reflect on and inventory their behaviors. Participants think about their relationships as they work through the list: "Which of these behaviors have you used? Circle all that apply and note the pattern that you created. What do you think the impact of this pattern of abuse has been on your partner or past partners?"

The Men Stopping Violence approach also addresses the issue of oppression for African American men. In group exercises, men analyze the elements and impacts of racism that they have experienced and compare them to sexism experienced by women. They also acknowledge how they have engaged in oppressive conduct toward women. The Intersectionality Exercise in the Men Stopping Violence curriculum Men at Work: Building Safe Communities addresses negative stereotypes to demonstrate how sexism, racism, and classism are intertwined. The exercise highlights how engaging in abusive, controlling, or prejudiced behavior in one area reinforces systematic oppression in other areas.

[98] Clarke, C. (Presenter). (2011, August 16). *Taking the domestic violence conversation to the community.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/taking-domestic-violence-conversation-community-nrcf-webinar

Incorporating Movies and Video Clips

Using movies and video clips can be a powerful way to start discussion and encourage self-reflection.

- Something My Father Would Do (15 minutes) presents the stories of three men who grew up with abusive fathers and had to grapple with their choices as intimate partners and fathers.
- Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity (82 minutes) examines the relationship between pop culture imagery and the social construction of masculine identities.
- Breaking Our Silence: Gloucester Men Speak Out Against Domestic Abuse (11 minutes) shows how groups of men can come together to promote nonviolence.
- Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes (60 minutes) explores manhood, sexism, race, gender violence, and homophobia in hip-hop culture and encourages discussion of manhood stereotypes.
- Generation M: Misogyny in Media & Culture (60 minutes) describes how negative definitions of femininity and hateful attitudes toward women get constructed and perpetuated in popular culture.
- Nobody Ever Earned It (3 minutes) was created by House of Ruth Maryland in partnership with the Maryland Department of Human Resources through a federal Responsible Fatherhood grant. This video shows the powerful role that fathers can play as five fathers reflect on the impact of domestic violence, particularly on children, and share their vision of living violence-free futures.

Engaging Men as Allies in Domestic Violence Prevention

Many programs build on education about the negative impacts of violent behavior to also encourage fathers to be role models for their children, families, and community. Some fatherhood programs use alumni networks or ambassador programs in which former participants go out into the community to emphasize the importance of non-violence. The Engaging Men and Youth Program, a project of the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women, notes that men are willing to get involved as role models and allies with women to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault.

Five Qualities of an Ally

1. An ally listens. Pay attention to, believe in, and respect what the person who needs help says.
2. An ally is present. Back the person up—by being a friend, by keeping your word, and by letting the person know when you can't be there.
3. An ally opens doors. Help the person explore available options, resources, and support. Provide useful information and share your resources and connections.
4. An ally takes chances. Sometimes we don't reach out because we fear we will make a mistake or say the wrong thing. An ally is bold. When they mess up, they fix it and try again. It's always important to take a chance and reach out.
5. An ally gets support. When you are helping someone, remember to take care of yourself. Don't do it all alone. Above all, an ally is a peacemaker.

The Ally Pledge

I promise not to be violent to my friends, my family, my lover, or to anyone else.

I promise to be an ally to myself, my sisters, my brothers, and to anyone under attack.

I promise to stand up for people and build my community.[99]

[99] Creighton, A., & Kivel, P. (1995). *Young men's work.* Oakland Men's Project.

Taking Action as a Bystander

The following tips on taking action as a bystander are drawn from a Men Stopping Violence brochure What You Can Say and Do to Make a Difference.

SHE SEEMS AFRAID OF HIM, can't finish a sentence around him, has visible bruises. He is your friend, your brother, a co-worker. You think you should do something.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Say what you see or experience. "I experience you…"

- Interrupting her.
- Criticizing her family.
- Yelling at and intimidating her.

Say how it affects you and how you feel.

- I'm surprised you'd use that language.
- That frightens and concerns me.
- I feel less respect for you.

Say what you think and want.

- You can't assault her and still claim to love or respect her.
- I want you to stop interrupting her and hear what she has to say.
- Even if you feel challenged by what she does, you still have no right to hit or yell at her.

If his behavior seems part of a pattern, say so.

If his behavior is a crime, label it.

Top Takeaways

- The following are some key considerations for fatherhood programs in addressing domestic violence:
- Develop and sustain partnerships with domestic violence organizations to:
  - Develop protocols to ensure shared understanding and guide service delivery.
  - Facilitate cross-training for fatherhood program and domestic violence partner agency staff.
  - Ensure all staff consistently and clearly model and encourage non-violent behavior and emphasize that violence is unacceptable in all relationships.
- Forming effective partnerships takes time, but ongoing constructive dialogue can help partners establish common ground and achieve mutual goals.
- Partners should work together to develop protocols that clearly explain key principles and strategies for addressing domestic violence.
- Use a mix of formal and informal screening approaches.
- Staff training should emphasize that violence is unacceptable in family relationships, include opportunities for self-reflection and growth, and clearly explain program strategies for raising fathers' awareness and encouraging non-violent behavior.
- Treat fathers with respect, help them talk about women without being demeaning, and encourage them to become allies in preventing domestic violence.
- Provide awareness-building activities and opportunities for participants to share their feelings, reflect on their past behaviors, and commit to healthy masculinity and preventing sexist and abusive behavior.
- Showing movies or video clips with clear messages from men about the negative impacts of domestic violence can be an effective way to encourage self-reflection, initiate discussion, and emphasize key points.

Helpful Resources

Screening and Self-Assessment Tools

- Screening tool template from the Colorado Department of Human Services.
- Screening and Assessment for Domestic Violence focuses on work with couples.
- Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative Grantee Implementation Evaluation: Addressing Domestic Violence in Hispanic Healthy Relationship Programs features example screenings in English and Spanish.

Partnership and Protocol Development

- Center for Family Policy and Practice
  - Enhancing Safety for Women: Communities of Color, Domestic Violence, and Social Welfare Services for Low-income Men by Jill Groblewski, 2013. Addresses the complex needs of domestic violence victims in impoverished communities. Covers ways to promote women's safety while providing holistic services that address the economic needs of both women and men in low-income communities.
  - Safety and Services: Women of Color Speak about Their Communities by Jacquelyn Boggess and Jill Groblewski, 2011. Report on a series of listening sessions with African American domestic violence survivors and advocates regarding the particular needs of survivors in low-income communities.
- Colorado Department of Human Services has a domestic violence protocol guide that includes a sample agreement between a fatherhood program and domestic violence prevention agencies.
- The Greenbook Initiative Final Evaluation Report (2008) describes how domestic violence service providers, child welfare agencies, and child dependency courts can work together to enhance victim safety, hold batterers accountable, and promote the stability and well-being of children. http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/SR/Greenbook/.

Curricula and Videos

- Understanding Domestic Violence curriculum module from the National Fatherhood Initiative (three one-hour sessions).
- Futures Without Violence: Breaking the Cycle: Fathering after Violence
- Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children by Katreena Scott, Karen Francis, Claire Crooks, and Tim Kelly, 2006. A manual for group intervention with men who have maltreated their children or exposed them to domestic violence.

Websites

- National Network to End Domestic Violence provides contact information for the 56 state and U.S. territory coalitions against domestic violence, which is an important resource for fatherhood programs who want to build partnerships with domestic violence prevention agencies and develop protocols.
- Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
- National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence
- Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence
- National Indigenous Women's Resource Center
- Engaging Men and Youth Program

Additional Resources

- Family Violence Prevention: A Toolkit for Stakeholders from the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families.
- Trauma-Informed Care for Children Exposed to Violence: Tips for Engaging Men and Fathers from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Safe Start Center.
- 10 Things Men Can Do to Prevent Gender Violence is a handout created by Jackson Katz that can be used to spark and guide discussion.
- Young Men as Allies in Preventing Violence and Abuse discusses how young men can play a critical role in constructing healthier, violence-free environments.

> **"Each father confronted with his child's diagnosis responds in his own unique way, often displaying a range of emotions including lack of understanding and fear … one thing fathers need to hear is that they are not in this alone … there are other fathers facing similar issues and there are coping strategies and resources that can help."**
>
> **W.C. Hoecke, Family Connection of South Carolina**

Dads of Children with Special Needs

"Children with special health care needs are those children who have, or are at risk for, chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally." [100]

Many families face the challenges associated with raising a child with special needs, a term that covers a broad range of conditions or chronic illnesses such as cerebral palsy, developmental delay, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, autism, Down syndrome, depression, asthma, sickle cell anemia, and cystic fibrosis.

[100] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Division of Services for Children with Special Health Care Needs. (2020). *Children with special health care needs.* https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/Data/NSCH/nsch-cshcn-data-brief.pdf

According to the 2009-10 National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs, approximately 15 percent of children in the United States are estimated to have special health needs, and 23 percent of households with children include a child with special health needs.[101] Special health needs exist across a wide spectrum and may involve medical, behavioral, developmental, learning, or mental health issues. But all involve worries and concerns that often lead to feelings of isolation and helplessness for parents. Although special health needs may not be the first issue that many fatherhood programs focus on, practitioners should be aware of the issue to fully meet the needs of their program participants.

Making sure that fatherhood program staff are aware of special needs issues and are prepared to assist fathers with support and resources can greatly strengthen services, particularly in programs that work with fathers of infants and young children. For example, most fatherhood curricula include handouts that illustrate the range of behaviors that generally can be expected at different stages of child development. By raising staff awareness, and while acknowledging that children move through these stages differently, a program can encourage fathers to ask for a second opinion if they think that their child is experiencing a developmental delay.

> **"It is inevitable there will be dads in your programs having disabilities themselves, and also some having children with disabilities … Preparing effectively to meet, interact with, and support dads having special needs or children with special needs will take some planning."**
>
> **Greg Schell, Washington State Fathers Network**

> **"We make the journey with dads because no man should be alone."**
>
> **Ray Morris, Dads 4 Special Kids**

[101] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration. (2013). *The National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs (NS-CSHCN).* https://www.childhealthdata.org/old-(pre-july-2018)/learn/NS-CSHCN

Terri Mauro is a mother of a special needs child who points out that children with special needs vary and their particular needs can include a variety of different health-related challenges:

- Mild learning disabilities to profound cognitive impairment.
- Food allergies to terminal illness.
- Developmental delays that catch up quickly to those that remain entrenched.
- Occasional panic attacks to serious psychiatric problems.[102]

Mauro outlines how the concerns that parents face may vary depending on the specific issues involved. For instance:

- **Medical issues** include serious conditions like cancer, heart defects, muscular dystrophy, and cystic fibrosis; chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes; congenital conditions like cerebral palsy and dwarfism; and health threats like food allergies and obesity. Children with medical issues may require numerous tests, long hospital stays, expensive equipment, and accommodations for disabilities. Their families have to deal with frequent crises, uncertainty, and worry.
- **Behavior issues** include diagnoses like ADHD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, sensory integration dysfunction, and Tourette syndrome. Children facing these issues may not respond to traditional discipline, so parents need to be flexible and creative. If strategies are not tailored to children's specific abilities and disabilities, children with behavior issues can throw their families into chaos and are at risk for serious problems in school.
- **Developmental issues** such as autism, Down syndrome, and intellectual disabilities are some of the most devastating for a family to deal with, changing visions of the future and providing immediate difficulties in caring for and educating a child. Parents of children with developmental issues must be fierce advocates to make sure their children receive the services, therapy, schooling, and inclusion they need and deserve.
- **Learning issues** like dyslexia and Central Auditory Processing Disorder often mean children struggle with schoolwork, regardless of their intellectual abilities. These children require specialized learning strategies to help them meet their potential and avoid self-esteem problems and behavioral difficulties. Parents of children with learning challenges need to be persistent both in working with their reluctant learners and with the schools that must provide the help these children need.
- **Mental health issues** can lead to anxiety or depression and involve problems that put family members on a roller coaster of mood swings, crises, and defiance. Parents have to find the right professionals to help and make hard decisions about therapy, medications, and hospitalization. The consequences of missed clues and wrong guesses can be significant.

[102] Mauro, T. (2020). *What are "special needs?"* http://specialchildren.about.com/od/gettingadiagnosis/p/whatare.htm

From a Father's Perspective

Practitioners with personal experience with children with special needs and who work with fathers of children with special health needs describe the feelings fathers may experience:

- **Loneliness and isolation**
  - James May, a pioneer in the area of fathers of children with special needs, pointed out that feelings of embarrassment about their child's lack of developmental appropriateness and the tendency to have fewer social supports than women lead to high feelings of isolation for many men.[103]
  - At a Fathers Network meeting in Columbia, South Carolina, one father remarked: *"All the other dads at the lunch table talked about how successful their kids were in their little league football games the over last weekend … I'm just thrilled my son is out of pull-up diapers.*[104]
- **"Hunter-provider" anxiety**
  - Many men in fatherhood programs feel ineffective as they struggle to find steady employment and balance their roles as fathers, husbands, and providers. These feelings may amplify when they face the demands and costs of medical or therapeutic care for their children.
  - Greg Schell of the Washington State Fathers Network reported that approximately 86 percent of children with special health care needs require prescription medications, 52 percent need specialty medical care, 33 percent need vision care, 25 percent require mental health care, 23 percent need specialized therapies, and 11 percent need special medical equipment.[105]
- **Strained marital relationships**
  - Although divorce rates for couples who have children with special needs are nearly identical to divorce rates of other families,[106] practitioners note that parents in these families often report low rates of marriage satisfaction.
  - Ray Morris noted, *"Having a child with special needs can put a strain on even the most solid marriage."* [107]
- **Feelings of inadequacy**
  - According to W.C. Hoecke, some fathers say their partners have become "super saints" or "super educators." They perceive their partners as "having all the information and answers" and feel their own perspective often is overlooked or ignored in dealing with their child's issues. These feelings can increase if mothers are the "primary receivers of information" and fathers have to rely on "second-hand information" from mothers.
  - A father in the Family Connection of South Carolina program said: *"I feel I can't compete with her level of informational knowledge about my child's disability, treatments, or knowledgeable care for my child."*

[103] May, J. (2002). *Fathers of children with special needs: New horizons* (2nd ed.). Fathers Network.

[104] Hoecke, W. C. (Presenter). (2008, September 23). *Working with fathers of special needs children.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-fathers-special-needs-children-nrfc-webinar

[105] Schell, G. (Presenter). (2008, September 23). *Working with fathers of special needs children.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-fathers-special-needs-children-nrfc-webinar

[106] Urbano, R. C., & Hodapp, R. M. (2007, July). Divorce in families of children with Down syndrome: A population-based study. *Journal on Mental Retardation,* 112(4), 261-74; Freedman, B. H., Kalb, L., Zablotsky, B., & Stuart, E. (2010, May 21). *Relationship status among parents of children with autism spectrum disorders: A population-based study.* Paper presented at the International Meeting for Autism Research, Philadelphia, PA. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-011-1269-y

[107] Morris, R. (Presenter). (2013, July 25). *Working with dads: Resources and support for fathers of children with special needs* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-dads-resources-and-support-fathers-children-special-needs-nrfc

Based on their experiences working with fathers who have children with special needs that span a broad spectrum, practitioners in the field also maintain that:

- Responsive fathering is a strong predictor of better developmental outcomes for children, including improved emotional regulation, communication skills, and cognitive and language development.
- Increased father involvement in early intervention services can ease the overall workload for mothers, reduce maternal stress, and strengthen family cohesion. However, fathers' needs often are overlooked.
- Fathers and mothers of children with special needs have many of the same issues and concerns, but there might be differences in how they respond to their child's condition, what they do to cope, and what they find helpful.
- If professionals are not involving fathers with father-specific services, they are missing important opportunities to maximize critical gains and supports for the children.
- Fathers want information about their child's condition and development, what can be done to help, and what services are available to help their child and the family as a whole.
- Fathers want someone outside the family to talk to about their worries and concerns; however, they might not be very good at seeking this type of help. Also, most fathers prefer male support groups because they feel more comfortable sharing their concerns with other men.
- Working is a common coping strategy for fathers and important for their identity and self-esteem. Fathers want flexibility from employers and service providers so they can respond to their children's needs, attend appointments, and be involved in decisions and care for their child.

> **When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door we do not see the one which has been opened to us."**
>
> **Helen Keller, Author and Activist** [108]

Handling Grief

Experts note that parents of children with special needs often experience grief as they struggle to adapt to their situation. Different kinds of grief exist, and fathers should understand there is not a "typical" grief process. Fatherhood programs have an opportunity to help fathers of children with special needs cope with grief that may stem from living in vastly different circumstances from what they might have anticipated. In her poem "Welcome to Holland," [109] Emily Perl Kingsley compares the experience to planning a fabulous vacation in one place, but then having to get accustomed to being somewhere very different. She pointed out that "the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever, go away because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss," but if you spend your life mourning you may never be free to enjoy the special things about your new destination. Practitioners can help both fathers and mothers navigate what can ultimately be a rewarding journey of resilience.

[108] Quoted by Schell, G. (Presenter). (2013, July 25). *Working with dads: Resources and support for fathers of children with special needs.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-dads-resources-and-support-fathers-children-special-needs-nrfc

[109] Kingsley, E. P. (1987). *Welcome to Holland.* http://www.creativeparents.com/Holland.html

Ways to Help Dads Cope:

- Offer men support to understand and feel they "are not in this alone."
  - Look for opportunities to connect them with other fathers, particularly those who have had similar experiences.
  - Set up social occasions for fathers to meet, exchange ideas, and promote father involvement with their child.
  - Schedule father-and-child activities that enable fathers to spend time with, and learn from, other dads and their children.
  - Host informal meals or social events to offer a non-threatening environment where men can develop contacts for ongoing support.
- Plan family-friendly activities where both fathers and mothers can get tips from other parents, observe family interactions, and experience a fun time that can increase fathers' confidence in their parenting and relationship abilities.
- Use strength-based terms such as "fathers' network" or "coach" rather than "support group" or "parent support."
- Help men recognize that they cannot "fix" health problems or disabilities, but can take action to improve outcomes for their children. For instance, they can learn how to navigate the Medicaid and healthcare systems and take advantage of various tax breaks.
- Research information on local, state, and national resources; develop partnerships with local organizations that support families with children with special needs; and share relevant information to help fathers with specific issues.
- Engage dads in activities and discussions that focus on identifying and understanding special needs and learning how to help a child who has challenges.
- Encourage fathers to communicate with schools and healthcare providers to avoid feeling like they have to rely on second-hand information from mothers.
- Highlight couples communication. Mothers often are at the center of child-related activities, which may contribute to maternal burnout and the father feeling like a student who must learn and take cues from the mother. Couples workshops or counseling may help mothers and fathers share the work and strengthen their bond.

> **"[There are] two tasks for a family with a new diagnosis: first, you must make a place for the disability in your family; second, you must put the disability in its place."**
>
> **Bill Doherty, Professor, University of Minnesota [110]**

[110] Quoted by Schell, G. (Presenter). (2008, September 23). *Working with fathers of special needs children.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-fathers-special-needs-children-nrfc-webinar

- Help fathers acknowledge their emotions so they can deal with their grief and strengthen their family relationships.
- Fathers of children with special needs can benefit from a general fatherhood group, particularly if staff are trained and aware of helpful resources. Support groups, either in person or online, with fathers in similar situations also can be beneficial for dads with unique needs.
    - Work with local fathers to start a support group if one does not yet exist in your community for fathers with children with special needs.

Top Takeaways

- With one in five U.S. households having a child with special needs, most fatherhood programs can expect to enroll at least some fathers who face the associated challenges.
- Fathers and mothers of children with special needs have many of the same needs and concerns; however, there can be significant differences in how they respond to their child's condition, what they do to cope, and what they find helpful.
- Fathers of children with special needs often experience loneliness and isolation, hunter-provider anxiety, strained marital relationships, or feelings of inadequacy.
- Parents of children with special needs often experience grief as they struggle to adapt to their situation. With support, most navigate what can ultimately be a rewarding journey of resilience.
- Fathers can understand they are not alone if they have opportunities to connect with other fathers and exchange ideas at scheduled social events.
- Men can recognize that even if they cannot fix the problem or disability, they can take action to improve their child's outcomes.
- Fathers want information about their child's condition and development, what can be done to help, and what services are available to help their child and the family as a whole.
- Couples who have children with disabilities often report low marriage satisfaction. Couples counseling or workshops on communication skills may help mothers and fathers strengthen their bond.

Spotlight on...

Washington State Fathers Network

Kindering has provided services for children with special needs and their families since 1962. Under the Kindering umbrella, the Fathers Network began to provide specific support for fathers in 1978, when it was known as the Fathers Program. The Fathers Network assists dads in becoming more competent and compassionate caregivers for their children with special needs. The program provides resources, information, and education; coordinates social activities for fathers and families; and facilitates biweekly discussion groups for dads. The program also offers referrals to family therapists who themselves have children with special needs, and holds a five-week group series, Unexpected Journey, for new mothers and fathers.

The University of Washington-Bothell conducted a 2012 survey of 146 Fathers Network participants. The study found that program participation had several positive effects:[111]

- Anxiety decreased - 97%
- Feelings of hopelessness decreased - 57%
- Enthusiasm toward their child increased - 69%
- Feelings of joy increased - 67%
- Family relationships improved - 77%
- Having someone to relate to increased - 80%

Family Connection of South Carolina

Family Connection provides support for families of children with special needs in South Carolina. The program organizes family events and provides topical workshops for dads. Since 2003, Family Connection also has trained fathers to work with other fathers as supportive coaches or mentors. The Family Connection Fathers Network supports fathers and families raising children who have developmental delays, disabilities, or chronic illness, and empowers these fathers to be actively engaged in their children's lives.

A 2009 survey of 109 Family Connection participants indicated that the fathers were particularly interested in: [112]

- Information about taxes, Medicaid, health insurance, nutrition, respite care, transition out of school, and ways to advocate for their children.
- Help dealing with financial issues, therapies for their children, housing, and employment.
- Skills to deal with relationship stress, improve communication, and resolve conflict.
- Parenting skills to handle discipline, behavior management, and sibling issues.
- Ways to create circles of support with family members and friends.

Dads 4 Special Kids[113]

Dads 4 Special Kids of Phoenix, Arizona, operates under four key principles:

- We can learn from each other.
- There is strength in numbers.
- We can share experiences and validate each other's journey.
- We have to take care of ourselves and our relationships.

Dads 4 Special Kids provides advocacy for dads, monthly support meetings, dad-to-dad support, and marriage and relationship support. The program's goals include helping parents learn to manage stress and communicate better through additional counseling and guidance. The program recognizes that many parents lose their personal identities and relationship priorities because their child with special needs receives so much attention. Therefore, the program is planning a couple's component to offer a series of three-hour workshops for groups of four to six couples to focus attention on them as individuals and relationship partners.

[111] Schell, G. (Presenter). (2013, July 25). *Working with dads: Resources and support for fathers of children with special needs* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-dads-resources-and-support-fathers-children-special-needs-nrfc

[112] Hoecke, W.C. (Presenter). (2013, July 25). *Working with dads: Resources and support for fathers of children with special needs.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-dads-resources-and-support-fathers-children-special-needs-nrfc

[113] Morris, R. (Presenter). (2013, July 25). *Working with dads: Resources and support for fathers of children with special needs.* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-dads-resources-and-support-fathers-children-special-needs-nrfc

Helpful Resources

- Family Voices is a national network focused on family-centered care for children and youth with special health care needs. The network maintains a list of Family-to-Family Health and Information Centers that help parents with children with special needs.
- Washington State Fathers Network provides support and resources for fathers of children with special needs in all states.
- Family Network on Disabilities offers various resources, including Fathers Welcome Packet: A Game Plan for Fathers, which was produced by Family Connection of South Carolina.
- Exceptional Parent is a monthly magazine that covers practical advice, emotional support, and educational information for families and health care and education professionals.
- Uncommon Fathers: Reflections on Raising a Child with a Disability by Donald Meyer features stories by dads for dads. https://archive.org/details/uncommonfathersroomeye
- The Arc is a national community-based organization serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, with chapters in most states.
- Dads Appreciating Down Syndrome (DADS) has 57 U.S. chapters unified by the theme, "We came together for our kids. We stay together for each other."
- Verywell Family features useful articles for parents, such as "How to Talk to Your Child About His or Her Special Needs," "Preparing for Family Gatherings," and "Understanding the Subtexts of Language."
- National Institutes of Health's Medline Plus, produced by the National Library of Medicine, provides reliable, up-to-date health information on diseases or conditions.
- 10 Encouragements for Dads of Kids Who Have Special Needs is a handout from All Pro Dad.
- The Center for Parent Information and Resources provides information and products created for a network of Parent Centers serving families of children with disabilities.

Working with the Child Welfare System

Although the child welfare system has not always focused attention on father involvement, some changes have come about in recent years. As a result, responsible fatherhood programs have opportunities to work with child welfare agencies and related professionals about ways to engage fathers and promote responsible fatherhood.

A fatherhood program might work, or establish a partnership, with a local child welfare agency to:

- Help fathers better understand how the child welfare system works.
- Help child welfare staff identify, engage, and provide appropriate services for fathers and families of children involved in the child welfare system.
- Ensure child welfare staff are aware of the fatherhood program's services.
- Encourage child welfare staff to refer fathers to the fatherhood program.

For a partnership to be productive, all fatherhood program staff, particularly those working directly with potential or active partners, should understand the role and perspective of child welfare workers as well as the mutual goals and benefits involved in working together.

> "Nonresident fathers of children in foster care are rarely involved in case planning for their children … nearly half had not been contacted by the child welfare agency. By not reaching out to fathers, caseworkers may overlook potential social connections and resources that could help to achieve permanency for the child." [114]

[114] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2006, December). Child welfare casework with nonresident fathers of children in foster care. *ASPE Issue Brief*. http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/CW-involve-dads/ib.pdf

Role of the Child Welfare System

The mission of the child welfare system is to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, providing services to families that need assistance in protecting and caring for their children, and helping to arrange permanent family connections for children who are placed in foster care.[115] When a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is received, an initial assessment and/or investigation is conducted to determine if protective services are needed. Depending on the situation, this may lead to a plan to provide services and support the family in the home, or it might result in temporary placement of the child outside the home with relatives or a foster family. If a child is placed out of the home, the goal is generally to reunify the family in approximately 12 months, depending on the severity of the situation.

Engaging non-resident fathers has potential social, medical, and economic benefits for their children. For example, it can not only enhance children's connection to their father but may also provide a better understanding of their family history, including important medical information, and it may lead to economic benefits, such as eligibility for child support, health insurance, social security, or other survivor benefits. Recent studies have highlighted the potential benefits of father involvement for children's safety and well-being. Urban Institute studies of child welfare agency efforts to increase father involvement show:[116]

- Non-resident fathers' involvement with their children is associated with a higher likelihood of a reunification outcome and a lower likelihood of an adoption outcome.
- Children with highly involved non-resident fathers are discharged from foster care more quickly than those whose fathers have less or no involvement.
- For children who are reunited with a parent, usually their mother, higher levels of non-resident father involvement are associated with a substantially lower likelihood of subsequent maltreatment allegations.

Similarly, other studies have shown:

- The non-residential father may play a role in ameliorating the circumstances that led to the abuse.
- Resident fathers who caused or contributed to harm are likely to remain involved with their children. They may also have more children. Effective engagement can be a protective factor for those children.[117]

If the father is not living in the home with the mother and children, which is often the case, he and his extended family still are potential resources. However, fathers are not always identified or located and often they are unaware of the child welfare system and its processes. Traditionally, child welfare workers focused on reunification with the parent from whom the child was removed, and tended to only engage that parent's relatives as temporary or permanent supports. While approaches vary by state and local policies, many child welfare system leaders have begun to change this situation.

[115] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). *How the child welfare system works.* https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork.cfm

[116] Malm, K., Murray, J., & Geen, R. (2006). *What about the dads? Child welfare agencies' efforts to identify, locate and involve nonresident fathers.* Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/CW-involve-dads/; Malm, K., Zielewski, E., & Chen, H. (2008). *More about the dads: Exploring associations between nonresident father involvement and child welfare case outcomes.* Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. http://www.urban.org/publications/411641.html

[117] Rosenberg, J., & Wilcox, W. B. (2006). *The importance of fathers in the healthy development of children.* U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/index.cfm

Legislative Background on the Child Welfare System

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), originally passed in 1974, laid the foundation for the child welfare system. CAPTA has been amended and/or reauthorized several times, most recently in 2019. Specific approaches vary from state to state, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau plays a major role in supporting service delivery through program funding and legislative initiatives.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 included provisions that can serve as an impetus to locate and include non-residential fathers in the child welfare process. For instance, ASFA pushed for acceleration of permanent placements for children, either reunification with biological parents, placement with other family members, or adoption, and generally reinforced "safety of the child" at every step of the case plan and review process.

> **"An involved responsible fatherhood program can assist dads in seeing themselves as part of a team seeking to create a healthy and safe home or homes for their children."**
>
> **Brian Clark, STRONG Fathers**

Barriers to Father Involvement in the Child Welfare System

"The most pressing barriers [to effective identification and location] include the endemic structural barrier [faced by] workers who have huge caseloads, which creates pressure on them to deal with the 'nuts and bolts' of managing cases, the lack of standards or guidelines for what constitutes a diligent effort to identify and locate non-resident fathers, and the biased view among some workers that engaging non-resident fathers will result in more pain than gain." [119]

Although fathers' roles and rights have gained more attention recently, many child welfare agencies still struggle to involve fathers fully. If a father does not live with the mother and is not regularly involved with the child, extra effort may be needed to identify or locate the father. Sometimes, a father may live with the mother or is an active co-parent, but does not want to be formally identified and involved in the child welfare system. The reasons vary: he might be an undocumented resident or providing child support informally, for example. Other times, a mother might want to avoid ceding rights to the father and potentially losing custody or decision-making control.

[118] As of November 2021, a new reauthorization bill was pending final approval by the U.S. Senate congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1927

[119] Howard, M. (2010). *Social worker training curriculum: Engaging the non-resident father*, p.18. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/social-worker-training-curriculum-engaging-non-resident-father

Mothers may be reluctant to talk about their children's fathers if they have a difficult relationship or there has been a history of domestic violence. In some cases, a mother may have a court order preventing a father from seeing his child. Juan Carlos Areán, an expert in the field of domestic violence, cautions that some women work hard to separate from fathers who have been violent in the past. He stresses that child welfare workers should fully assess the situation and be clear that men who have been violent must change their behaviors. At minimum, they should complete an intervention program for abusers.[120]

While child welfare staff should assess all situations carefully, identifying the father still can be useful in order to consider his relatives a potential resource. Even if it is determined that a father should not be involved, there could be cases where his relatives might provide a positive alternative to other outcomes, such as a foster home or adoption placement. This may be particularly relevant if the mother has chronic issues or violent tendencies that make reunification especially challenging.

The child welfare process can give a father the chance to re-enter a child's life. Often, the father of a child involved with the child welfare system may be responsible for taking care of other children or supporting another family. The child welfare system can work with him to outline his contribution to a child's service plan. Even if his circumstances prevent him from being the child's main caretaker, he has a presumptive right and responsibility to co-parent with the mother or another caregiving family member. If parental rights are terminated, the father's involvement may create a relationship with the permanent family that allows the father and child to stay connected.

"Several [child welfare professionals] described how some mothers provided false information about the fathers to discourage staff from trying to engage the fathers. As one respondent stated 'dads aren't always what the moms make them out to be.' There are always two sides to a story. Child welfare workers may find a good dad, despite negative stories from a mom. Or they may work with fathers to successfully lessen the safety concerns described by mothers."[121]

Child welfare professionals report additional barriers to father involvement:

- Difficulty identifying and locating fathers.
- Gatekeeping by mothers.
- Lack of interest by fathers.
- Lack of paternity establishment.
- Lack of resources and services to refer fathers to.
- Difficulty knowing how to get fathers more involved.
- Lack of staff time.
- Lack of clear policy on when and how to involve dads.
- Stereotypes about fathers.[122]

Fatherhood programs can help address most of these are barriers: indirectly by encouraging or assisting in child welfare staff training or directly by accepting referrals, encouraging fathers to get more involved, and assisting fathers with specific issues.

[120] Areán, J. C., (2009, Spring). Putting fathers back in the picture. *Rise*, 12(3). https://www.risemagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Rise_issue_12-fathers.pdf

[121] Minnesota Fathers and Families Network. (2011). *Linking fathers: Child welfare sector analysis.* https://www.mnfathers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/LinkingFathersChildWelfare.pdf

[122] Ibid.

Mutual Goals and Benefits

To establish productive relationships with child welfare agencies, fatherhood programs can take several important initial steps:

- Explain how identifying a father can help child welfare workers meet their goals of increasing child safety and well-being. For example:
  - They may learn important information about the medical history of the father and other paternal relatives that can benefit the child. For instance, there may be a family history of diabetes or severe allergies.
  - The child may be eligible for certain benefits through the father, such as health insurance, survivor benefits, or child support.
  - Even if children cannot be placed with their non-resident father, identifying him may lead to paternal relatives who could be valuable resources for permanent placement or support.
  - Identifying a father can be the first step to involving him more fully in his child's life, and research has shown that involving non-resident fathers as responsible co-parents is associated with a substantially lower likelihood of subsequent maltreatment allegations.
- Share examples of issues many non-resident fathers face, such as lack of financial resources, depression or other mental health problems, or substance abuse. Explain how the fatherhood program can help men deal with those issues either directly or through community referrals.
- Emphasize the knowledge and experience the fatherhood program staff have for understanding and communicating with men, and how this can help child welfare staff meet their goals.
- Offer to assist with training to help staff identify and overcome any biases they may have about working with men, show the benefits of working with fathers, and discuss ways to directly help fathers.
- Participate in meetings between child welfare caseworkers and fathers to ensure communication and understanding of key information.
- Explain the services the fatherhood program offers and how they fit into the child welfare framework. For example:
  - Encouraging non-resident fathers to participate in case planning or parenting sessions.
  - Identifying external family support systems.
  - Providing case management services with emotional support and encouragement to help men identify and address barriers to involvement.
  - Developing strategies to help non-resident fathers enhance their communication and parenting skills and succeed in meeting their co-parenting responsibilities.
  - Making referrals to community partners that can help non-resident fathers with issues such as employment or education assistance, mental health or substance abuse treatment, and intervention for domestic violence.

"Child welfare workers can best assist non-residential fathers by engaging them in ways that recognize the strain fathers are under and their desire to be better providers for their children. In practical terms, child welfare workers can also refer fathers to programs that can help them find good jobs, manage their finances, and learn how to navigate the systemic barriers they face." [123]

Because child welfare staff often have large caseloads, they need training and support to ensure the circumstances of mothers and fathers are fully considered in each case. In particular, they should avoid broad assumptions, such as "all non-resident fathers are irresponsible," or boilerplate requirements, such as "all fathers need to attend parenting classes."

Child Welfare Staff Training

The Minnesota Department of Human Services offers Engaging Fathers, a course for county and tribal child welfare staff that gives participants opportunities to:

- Understand internal biases they might have about fathers.
- Explore safety, gender, and other biases that can affect success in engaging fathers.
- Identify and examine barriers fathers confront.
- Develop effective strategies to overcome barriers to father involvement.
- Learn and apply legal requirements for working with fathers.
- Increase child safety, permanency, and well-being.[124]

[123] Cherry, K., & Brown, C. (2009). Helping child welfare workers better understand and engage non-resident fathers. *Protecting Children*, 24(2), 66-75.

[124] Minnesota Fathers and Families Network. (2011). *Linking fathers: Child welfare sector analysis.* mnfathers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/LinkingFathersChildWelfare.pdf

Fatherhood program practitioners who have worked with local child welfare agencies recommend:

- "Training for child welfare professionals about responsible fatherhood and related research is helpful, but can have limits. Some staff find it hard to change their approach. Reinforcement by supervisors and colleagues can help remind them of the potential benefits of father involvement and the need to re-think what they do."
- "While emphasizing the potentially positive role that non-resident fathers can play, fatherhood practitioners should not overlook the mother. The goal is not to pit one parent against another, but to figure out how to involve both parents in their child's life."
- "Fatherhood practitioners should acknowledge and emphasize their understanding that the first priority of the child welfare system is to serve children in the best way possible. This alone is potential leverage for responsible fatherhood providers."
- "It may be hard for child welfare professionals to understand why fatherhood programs might want to partner with them. It is important to come to them in a positive way. A negative stance will get you nowhere."
- "One of the most effective strategies is to help caseworkers engage fathers by exploring each dad's vision of fatherhood. Dads might be asked questions such as 'What do you want to get out of being a father?' or 'What does fatherhood mean to you?' and 'How do you want your children to remember you after you have passed away?'"

Spotlight on…

The **Engaging Fathers** project was a collaboration between the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) and the Fathers and Families Center (FFC) in Indianapolis. The project was one of four funded by the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) to explore models for systemic collaboration between fatherhood programs and the child welfare system.[125] FFC had a full-time staff person onsite at the Marion County DCS office to serve as the initial contact for non-resident fathers, help them navigate the child welfare and court systems, and provide training and support to DCS staff about father engagement.

Participating fathers attended a 20-week peer support group that used the Bringing Back the Dads curriculum developed by QIC NRF. The support groups provided information about parenting skills, the child welfare system, and other legal issues. Fathers were eligible for other FFC services, such as job assistance, GED preparation, relationship counseling, and transportation.

A preliminary evaluation found the program helped empower fathers and supplied a much-needed support network. The evaluation also showed that collaboration was beneficial for the partnering organizations. FFC staff learned more about the child welfare system and how to help fathers with children involved with the system. FFC now routinely asks all program participants if they have children involved with the child welfare system. Additionally, DCS staff have become more familiar with fatherhood issues and FFC services. They have implemented new ways to locate and engage non-resident fathers and verify information provided by mothers.

Spotlight on…

The **STRONG**[126] **Fathers** program was run by The Opportunity Alliance in Portland, Maine, from 2006 to 2011. When STRONG Fathers began interacting with the local Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), the program was considered a place to send OCFS involved fathers for parenting classes. However, in 2010 a more robust partnership was established to provide technical assistance to OCFS caseworkers and trainers to increase the number of fathers actively engaged in the reunification process. Additionally, a $15 a week fee for service per father referred by OCFS was introduced to cover some of the costs of service.

Brian Clark, a STRONG Fathers program coordinator, reports:

"When developing a connection to child welfare agencies, one that goes beyond just asking for program referrals, it is important to remember that you have been hearing only one side of the story from the fathers with whom you have worked over the years. I had listened to dads' side of the story for years, but now had to understand that I was only hearing part of the story. It is important to work with caseworkers to understand the behaviors that they hope dads will change, and what successful parenting looks like for each father involved … fatherhood program staff need to demonstrate a desire to understand and be open to a different perspective—one that can assist fathers in more successfully overcoming barriers and minimizing conflict with their caseworkers.

"When working with dads involved with child welfare, fatherhood programs need to be prepared for the possibility that dads may not prevail. Fathers often face many barriers and the timeframe for a case is short. Fatherhood practitioners must become adept at talking with dads about this possibility … Ultimately, the best thing a fatherhood program can do is help dads change the conversation from 'What program/services do I need to complete?' to 'What behaviors do I need to change?' and 'How can I show that I've changed them?' … the check list approach to working with dads is prevalent [in child welfare case management], but just showing up to groups, counseling, etc. doesn't mean you get your kid. I've worked with several dads who say 'I've done everything that they have asked, but nothing's changed.' That's because the check list doesn't matter. Only behavior matters."

[125] Funding for this project came through QIC NRF, which was created in 2006 with funding from the Children's Bureau to American Humane and its partners, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and the National Fatherhood Initiative. As part of this initiative, QIC NRF funded four sites in 2008 to help determine the impact of non-resident father involvement on child welfare outcomes. In addition to the Indiana project, projects in Fort Worth (TX), Seattle (WA), and Colorado Springs (CO) received awards.

[126] STRONG is an acronym for "Strength, Thoughtfulness, Respect, Openness, Nurturing, and Growth."

Top Takeaways

- Recent studies highlight the potential benefits of father involvement for the safety and well-being of children involved with the child welfare system.
- Fatherhood programs can look for opportunities to talk with child welfare agencies about the research that shows how children benefit when fathers are engaged in child welfare cases.
- Before talking with child welfare agencies about partnerships, fatherhood programs should ensure they understand the role and perspective of child welfare caseworkers and the potential benefits of working together.
- Fatherhood programs can help child welfare professionals incorporate effective strategies for locating and engaging fathers.
- Fatherhood programs can describe how their services, experience, and community connections can be helpful at various stages of child welfare system processes.
- Consider opportunities to contract with child welfare agencies to provide direct services for fathers with children involved with the child welfare system.

Helpful Resources

For Child Welfare Agencies

- National Family Preservation Network offers a Basic Fatherhood Training Curriculum, video materials, and other resources to help child welfare professionals involve fathers in their children's lives.
- ***Social Worker Training Curriculum: Engaging the Non-Resident Father.*** National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF)
- Final Report of the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (2006-2011)
- Bringing Back the Dads: Changing Practices in Child Welfare Systems, special edition of Protecting Children.
- Guide for Father Involvement in Systems of Care from the Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health, a collaboration of the American Institutes for Research and the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health under a federal contract to provide technical assistance to systems of care communities.
- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections provides training, technical assistance, and information to strengthen and support child welfare agencies.
- Staff of the New York State Office of Child and Family Services discuss how they prepared local agencies to use the State's Locating and Engaging Fathers Toolkit.

Curricula for Work with Fathers Involved with the Child Welfare System

- Bringing Back the Dads: A Model Program Curriculum for Non-Resident Father Engagement by L. Morley, L. Wilmot, J. Berdie, L. Bruce, and P. Frankel, 2008, QIC NRF and the Child Welfare System. A 40-hour, 20-week curriculum.
    - One of the two-hour sessions shows dads how the child welfare system works. Facilitators are encouraged to invite a representative of the child welfare system to participate in the session and answer questions.
- Supporting Father Involvement is a 32-hour, 16-week evidence-based curriculum designed as a preventive intervention to enhance fathers' positive involvement with their children. The curriculum was field tested in 2003 in Family Resource Centers across five California counties.
- National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF)

For Fatherhood Programs and Fathers

- National Fatherhood and Child Welfare Network is a Google group that includes a website and listserv.
- Finding Your Way: Guides for Fathers in Child Protection Cases. American Bar Association and American Humane, 2011. A series of guides with information on fathers' rights and responsibilities, working with a lawyer, handling court situations, and what to do when you owe child support or have been in prison. Guide 3, Your Role in Court, includes some good tips for fathers.
- Trauma-Informed Care for Children Exposed to Violence: Tips for Engaging Men and Fathers. From Safe Start Center, National Resource Center for Children's Exposure to Violence.
- Rise Magazine special 2009 issue on fathers' rights and roles, written by and for parents involved in the child welfare system.
- What About the Dads? Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate and Involve Nonresident Fathers by K. Malm, J. Murray, and R. Geen, 2006, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.
    - A summary of the information presented in What About the Dads? is provided in Child Welfare Casework with Nonresident Fathers of Children in Foster Care, ASPE Issue Brief, December 2006, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Washington, DC.
- More About the Dads: Exploring Associations between Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Welfare Case Outcomes by K. Malm, E. Zielewski, and H. Chen, 2008, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Washington, DC.
- How the Child Welfare System Works from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.
- Linking Fathers: Child Welfare Sector Analysis from the Minnesota Fathers and Families Network.
- The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect.
- About CAPTA: A Legislative History from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

Enhancing Cultural Competence to Engage Fathers

> "Culture refers to the body of learned beliefs, traditions, principles, and guides for behavior that are commonly shared among members of a particular group. Culture serves as a road map for both perceiving and interacting with the world." [127]

> "Cultural competence [refers to] a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be developed over time in order to work with those who appear and may be different from us." [128]

One goal of fatherhood and other family strengthening programs should be to design and deliver services in a culturally competent manner. Integrating cultural competence into such programs is important to improving the overall effectiveness of program activities and improving access to quality resources that are respectful of and responsive to the needs of a diverse group of participants. Infusing cultural competence is an ongoing process that takes place at both the individual and organizational levels.

At the individual level, fatherhood practitioners should follow a process of *cultural humility*, which encourages personal reflection and growth while learning with and from clients.[129] This means that practitioners must be able to:

- Recognize and become aware of their own biases and prejudices.
- Gather cultural information continually from respected websites, community members, and most importantly from participants, who are best suited to educate others about their unique cultural experiences and perspectives.
- Avoid pre-judging participants based on cultural background or otherwise treating individuals unfairly or unjustly.
- Engage participants and stakeholders from cultures represented in the target population to get their buy-in, ownership, and input when designing programs and services for them. Seek input from a variety of people and resources and never rely on one person to speak for an entire community.
- Provide services in participants' languages, particularly when serving fathers who are recent immigrants or refugees and speak a language other than English. Communicating in participants' own languages helps build trust and makes organizational environments more comfortable and welcoming.
- Recognize that program participants are likely to have various levels of English proficiency. Some bilingual fathers will have a good command of English, but others might need more support to ensure clear communication. Even monolingual English speakers might speak in different dialects and use phrases that staff may need to be aware of.

[127] Messina, S. (1994). *A youth leader's guide to building cultural competence* (p. 8). Advocates for Youth. http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/guide.pdf

[128] Warrier, S. (2005). *Culture handbook* (p. 5). San Francisco, CA: Family Violence Prevention Fund. http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/ImmigrantWomen/Culture%20Handbook.pdf

[129] Hook, J. N., Davis, D. E., Owen, J., Worthington Jr., E. L., & Utsey, S. O. (2013, July). Cultural humility: Measuring openness to culturally diverse clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 60(3), 353–366.

> "To effectively assess and meet the needs of any family requires setting aside personal prejudices or preconceived ideas and taking the time to get to know the individuals. Building an effective client-provider partnership based on mutual respect will improve service provision and increase the likelihood of the family's success in reaching its goal of self-sufficiency." [130]

> "We help staff identify their own biases or prejudices and develop self-knowledge of situations in which they may not be as effective … at times this may involve staff acknowledging their own challenges and removing themselves from work with specific individuals; at other times, it may need to be an organizational decision."
>
> Joe Jones, Center for Urban Families

At the organizational level, programs should:

- Assess and revise policies and procedures to ensure they support culturally competent services.
- Recognize that there is remarkable heterogeneity within cultural/racial/ethnic groups, which can create challenges to service delivery. Organizations should understand their clientele's demographics and adjust programming accordingly. For example, a strategy that works with one group of Hispanics may not work with another community of Hispanics.[131] Additionally, national news, issues, or trends regarding Hispanics or Latinos may contradict the incredible diversity of people who are of Hispanic or Latino heritage.
- Provide regular training to help staff understand the process of cultural humility and identify their own biases or prejudices.
- Continually assess the organizational culture to ensure that all staff feel welcomed, appreciated, and able to fully participate in the work. Everyone in the program should have opportunities to express their thoughts and perspectives about written and unwritten rules, policies, norms, and values.
- Ensure that program materials, including brochures, posters, and data collection forms, reflect the cultural diversity of program participants. For data collection, forms might need to be modified to ensure questions are clear and the type of response requested is understandable.

[130] National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. (2014). *Working with African American individuals, couples, and families* (p. 52). https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e000002802.pdf

[131] The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably; service providers should ask program participants how they self-identify. See: National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. (2013, May). *Working with Latino individuals, couples, and families.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e000002684.pdf; Bates, K. G. (2014, January 21). *'Hispanic' or 'Latino'? Polls say it doesn't matter — Usually.* National Public Radio; Lopez, M. H. (2013, October 28). *Hispanic or Latino? Many don't care, except in Texas.* Pew Research Center.

Developing Cultural Humility: Self-Reflection Exercises

"In practicing cultural humility, rather than learning to identify and respond to sets of culturally specific traits, the culturally competent provider develops and practices a process of self-awareness and reflection." [132]

The following exercises are adapted from a presentation by Margie Akin at a 2007 California Health Advocates conference.[133] Program staff can do the exercises alone or with colleagues during staff training.

1. Identify your own cultural and family beliefs and values.

- For example, think about your experiences growing up. What was your relationship with your father like? What was your parents' relationship like? What about your grandparents? What are some of the key lessons you learned growing up that you would like to pass on to your children?

2. Define your own personal culture/identity: ethnicity, age, experience, education, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, and faith or spiritual beliefs.

- How have you integrated your early experiences into who you are today? To what extent have your beliefs and values changed as you have grown up?

3. Are you aware of your personal biases and assumptions about people with different values than yours?

- For example, are there situations in which you find it hard to relate to some program participants? Or perhaps you have noticed that some participants are less likely to confide in you than other staff members?

4. Challenge yourself in identifying your own values as the "norm."

- For instance, think about and describe a time when you were aware of being different from other people.

[132] California Health Advocates. (2007). *Are you practicing cultural humility? – The key to success in cultural competence.* https://cahealthadvocates.org/are-you-practicing-cultural-humility-the-key-to-success-in-cultural-competence/

[133] Ibid.

Strong Foundation for Engagement

Veteran practitioners advise programs to listen to fathers' beliefs and use a variety of strategies to help them strengthen their approach to parenting, relationships, and employment. "Building trust means allowing people to be who they are instead of who we think they should be," one practitioner said. "You have to reach them to teach them."

Staff and Participant Cultural Backgrounds

Those who work in the fatherhood field generally agree that as much as possible, fatherhood program staff should reflect the cultural populations being served. For work with Latino fathers and recent immigrants or refugees, having bilingual staff is important. Programs also should have access to interpreters who have experience with major dialects in the community.

Some people in the field believe that fathers are best served by men of the same racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. For example, that African American practitioners are best suited to work with African American fathers.

> "We make sure that everyone is welcome. You have to make your agency inviting; it must look diverse. We use photos … You need to understand the culture of your clients. You should never get to the point where you think you know their culture. We want to always be in a position of learning."
>
> Wallace McLaughlin, Fathers and Families Center

> "In our fatherhood program, we strive to maintain cultural sensitivity, greet everybody warmly, seek to understand their cultural background, avoid being judgmental, look to challenge aspects of their culture that may not be healthy, and focus on values and examples to pass on to our children … start with humility … When people are treated with respect, they will give you respect."
>
> Ted Strader, Council on Prevention and Education: Substances, Inc. (COPES)

Others believe that a culturally competent practitioner of any background can form a trusting and helping relationship with any father seeking services. Successful fatherhood programs that represent both of these approaches exist. For example, the Responsible Fatherhood program at the Center for Urban Families in Baltimore is staffed by African American men who work with African American fathers. The Healthy Families program in San Angelo, Texas, works primarily with Latino fathers and is staffed by practitioners from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds.

Programs can seem more relevant and welcoming when fathers see staff members who look like them, speak the same language, and share key cultural experiences. However, those similarities lose significance if staff members seem aloof, judgmental, or insensitive. Disconnects can happen as a result of education and class differences. The most effective practitioners are those who have empathy, can connect with the individual as a person, observe and ask questions, and take other actions to ensure they are knowledgeable and understanding of the variety of cultural backgrounds.

Program graduates can become very effective staff members because they have "been there, done that" and have had similar experiences prior to and after participating in the program. Several programs have found ways to bring graduates on as part-time outreach workers or co-facilitators, and some established programs have created a career ladder for graduates. At the Center for Urban Families, 15 percent of full-time staff and 100 percent of the outreach team are former participants.

Values Influence Behavior

Ted Strader of COPES pointed out that members of the same racial, cultural, or ethnic group might have differing experiences, norms, and values. You cannot assume that all Latino participants, all Black participants, all Asian participants, or all reentry citizens are homogeneous groups. Most people have multiple and varied cultural experiences growing up and throughout their lives. These cultural experiences determine the unique values people hold and the norms that guide behavior. COPES staff have identified a wide range of cultural backgrounds among participants in their Kentucky-based program, including male culture, female culture, criminal culture, gang culture, substance abuse culture, Black urban culture, Black rural culture, white urban culture, white rural culture, culture of despair, culture of denial, and culture of poverty.[134]

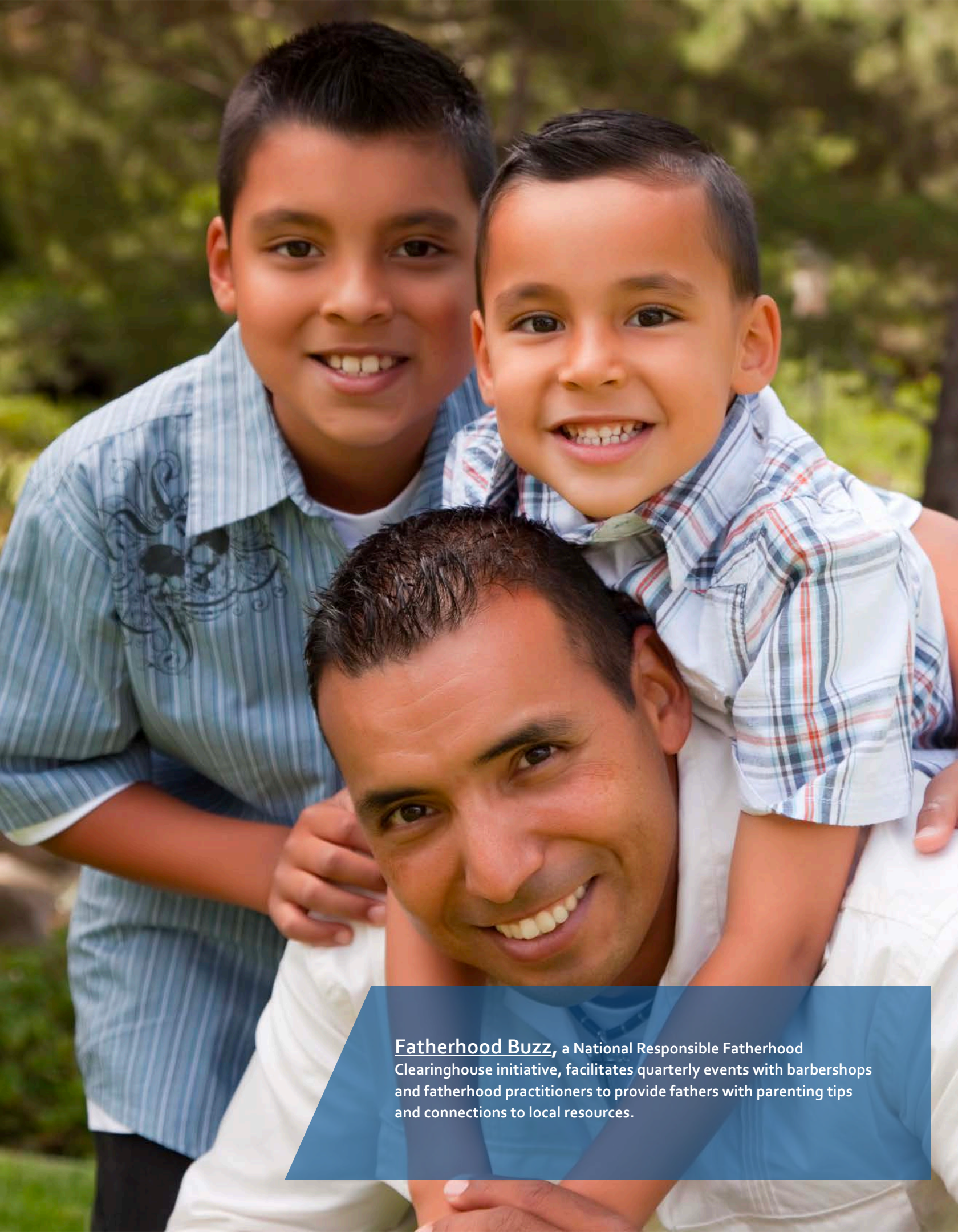
[134] Strader, T., & Stuecker, R. (2012). *Creating lasting family connections: Secrets to successful facilitation.* Resilient Futures Network.

As a result of long-term oppression and discrimination, many groups have been marginalized and their value systems have been denied, ignored, or disrespected. Culturally competent practitioners learn not to impose their own values on others who do not share those values. However, there are some universal values that programs must uphold. For instance, programs must demonstrate zero tolerance for child abuse or domestic violence in any form. This can cause tension when covering topics such as corporal punishment for children. Program staff should recognize and respect the fact that different cultures, communities, and families might have different perspectives on child discipline and punishment. Provide time for participants to express their viewpoints, avoiding judgmental or critical responses, and help participants see that there are more effective ways to change behavior than attempting to coerce or threaten someone. According to Strader, the difference is between "the power of influence" and "the influence of power." In other words, creating an environment of mutual learning and respect is generally more effective in helping people come to their own conclusions, rather than lecturing them and insisting that they do things your way.

Making a Culturally Relevant Impact

Many of the first fatherhood programs in the 1980s and 1990s began in cities such as Baltimore, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, and Newark, largely in response to the significant challenges faced by low-income, predominantly African American fathers in these urban areas. At the same time, a few programs began work with diverse groups of white, Hispanic, and Native American fathers. The number of programs and diversity of populations served has continued to grow over the last two decades. Drawing on their experiences with cultural competence, practitioners recommend:

- **Gaining credibility** – Employ well-trained staff with roots in the community who can connect, identify with, and build trust with fathers. This has two benefits. First, fathers in the community perceive that they can discuss their concerns honestly and not get the runaround they may have experienced at other programs. Second, culturally competent staff can build networks with communities of fathers and also with community-based organizational partners to increase the program's visibility and credibility.
    - ***Example:*** African American men can be frustrated and angry about the discrimination and harassment they experience from employers, the courts, or social service agencies. Practitioners must be able to build trust, "keep it real," "tune in" to, and empathize with potential participants to gain trust and credibility.
    - ***Example:*** Many Latinos value personalismo (a preference for warm personal interactions), so establishing personal connections with participants needs to begin during outreach and recruitment and continue throughout program participation. Remember that outreach and intake are not business transactions. Listen to participants, hear their stories, and offer them hope.
- **Recruiting in the community** – Specially trained outreach workers, often including former participants who can vouch for the program, can effectively recruit participants from community locations where men tend to gather.
    - ***Example:*** In the African American community, neighborhood barbershops are community hubs for many men that serve far more than their grooming needs. Barbershops are where they discuss personal and public issues, making them ideal places to do outreach and recruitment.



Fatherhood Buzz, a National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse initiative, facilitates quarterly events with barbershops and fatherhood practitioners to provide fathers with parenting tips and connections to local resources.

- **Using culturally relevant materials** – Curricula and resources designed for the population you serve should include culturally relevant language, pictures, and examples. Bilingual handouts, brochures, and fact sheets are essential to reach Latino dads and recent immigrants or refugees. Materials must be sensitive to literacy levels and language differences and not merely a translation or adaptation of programs for other minority populations.

- **Incorporating cultural techniques and traditions** – Some programs use techniques such as opening and closing rituals, in which men recite fatherhood pledges or participate in activities designed to call on faith, spirit, or ancestors for support and guidance as they strive to be responsible men and fathers. Others, particularly programs working with Native American and Latino fathers, stress a healing-informed, culturally specific approach for service delivery rooted in indigenous principles and practices. More programs for African American fathers are also adapting "healing circles" or models that help fathers acknowledge and release past hurts and anger.

  - ***Example:*** Storytelling can help all fathers reflect on their cultural and personal histories. Storytelling is often effective in Native American, Latino, and African American communities with strong cultural traditions of oral and other forms of storytelling.

  - ***Example:*** Family-centeredness is a value that resonates particularly with Latino and Native American communities. Messages that underscore how the skills taught in the program will benefit the whole family can reinforce Latino values related to familismo and the philosophy stressed by the Native American Fathers and Families Association that "family is at the heart of Native American cultures." [135] Messages about the benefits of program participation for their children are also compelling with African American fathers who grew up without a strong paternal influence and do not want their children to have the same experience.

- **Infusing cultural style and mannerisms** – Staff should be authentic, be strong role models and mentors, and if possible reflect, or at least connect with, some of the cultural styles of the men they work with.

  - ***Example:*** "There are styles that many Black men display from their style of walk … that Black man hug or shoulder bump … that straightforward, direct, style of talking and "keeping things real" that is easy to recognize and has become a part of popular culture in many African American communities." [136]

  - ***Example:*** American Indian and Alaskan Native people may communicate through non-verbal gestures. For instance, they may look down to show respect or deference to elders or ignore an individual to show disagreement or displeasure.[137]

  - ***Example:*** In many Hispanic cultures, using usted (rather than tú) to indicate respect, especially in early interactions and sessions is congruent with respeto, which encourages deferential behavior toward people with higher social rank as designated by age, gender, authority, or position. Once participants move to the more informal tú, facilitators can follow suit. Some program service providers also use honorifics to provide respect, such as addressing participants as "Don José" instead of "Señor Rodríguez." Using the client's first name with the formal "Don" (loosely translated as "Mister") conveys respect without sacrificing familiarity.[138]

[135] A. Pooley (personal communication, May 23, 2012).

[136] P. Wilson (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

[137] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2009). *American Indian and Alaska Native culture card: A guide to build cultural awareness.* https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma08-4354.pdf

[138] Torres, L., Hyra, A., & Bouchet, S. (2013). *Hispanics and family-strengthening programs: Cultural strategies to enhance program participation.* Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative: Grantee Implementation Evaluation, OPRE Report 2013-19. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/hispanics-and-family-strengthening-programs-cultural-strategies-enhance-program

- **Adopting a multigenerational approach** – Encouraging reflection on the lives and customs of previous generations can lead to a process of learning or remembering positive cultural values, principles, customs, and traditions that fathers can use to enhance their personal growth and strengthen their families.
    - ***Example:*** An appeal to family history may be as simple as asking participants to reflect on how their grandfathers might handle certain situations.
    - ***Example:*** During the early twentieth century, many American Indian children grew up apart from their traditional culture in military-style boarding schools or foster homes. Although these practices ended in the 1960s and 1970s respectively, there are still repercussions for some people today. Practitioners who work with Native American fathers recommend helping men embrace their traditional culture so they can separate positive elements from negative experiences. They emphasize that without introspection ("looking within"), men may be destined to pass negative behaviors and ways on to other generations.
    - ***Example:*** Latino families' living arrangements are often larger, multigenerational, and more likely to include extended families, with more than one family in a household or families living in proximity. In this environment, men may become responsible for the needs, concerns, and finances of a large group of people, sometimes including family members in another state or country. Programs have an opportunity to build on this sense of kinship through positive support, education, and reinforcement.
- **Being patient and persistent** – Even the most successful programs need time to establish themselves in a community.
    - ***Example:*** When Joe Jones first began working with fathers in East Baltimore through the Baltimore City Healthy Start program, his team often held fatherhood groups with only two or three men but actively recruited other men to the program. In 1999, Jones moved the program's location and founded the Center for Urban Fathers, which now serves several hundred fathers a year and brings back successful alumni to testify to the benefits of program participation.
    - ***Example:*** National immigration issues and the trauma experienced by many immigrants and refugees have created mistrust in many communities of initiatives claiming to help them. Programs need to patiently build trust and implement creative strategies to increase participation. Participants might need to be convinced that a fatherhood program cares about them as individuals and can provide a safe place to learn. For example, holding meetings in local houses of worship may make fathers more likely to attend.

Top Takeaways

- Cultural competence is an ongoing process that takes place at both the individual and organizational levels. Practicing cultural humility, which involves a process of self-awareness and reflection, plays a key role in enhancing cultural competence.
- At the individual level:
  - Assess your own biases.
  - Seek cultural information from a variety of sources.
  - Network with stakeholders from different cultural groups and communities.
  - Be welcoming, respectful, and non-judgmental of potential participants from all cultures and backgrounds.
  - Recognize the diversity within members of the same racial, ethnic, or cultural group.
- At the organizational level:
  - Assess policies and procedures.
  - Provide training to all staff on cultural competency and cultural humility.
  - Reach out to underserved populations.
  - Hire staff members who reflect the target population.
- Rather than imposing values, listen to and respect participants' cultural beliefs and practices. Create an environment of mutual learning and respect that helps people come to their own conclusions rather than relying on lecturing that insists they do things your way.
- To gain credibility in the community, employ well-trained staff who can connect, resonate, and build trust with fathers.
- Use curricula and resource materials that include culturally relevant language, pictures, and examples.
- Incorporate cultural techniques and traditions such as storytelling to help fathers reflect on their cultural and personal histories.
- A multi-generational approach that encourages reflection on the lives and customs of ancestors can enhance personal growth as fathers learn or remember positive cultural values, principles, and traditions.

Helpful Resources

- Culture Handbook by Sujata Warrier (2005) was designed primarily for use in work with victims of domestic and sexual violence. The handbook includes useful observations and tips for all family strengthening programs.
- A Youth Leader's Guide to Building Cultural Competence by Susan Messina (1994) was designed for work with youth, but includes observations and tips that are relevant for fatherhood programs.
- The Institute for Black Male Achievement is a membership network of organizations and leaders working to improve life outcomes for Black men and boys at the local, regional, and national levels. The network focuses on expanding work opportunities, strengthening family structures, and increasing educational equity.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration worked with public health service officers, American Indian/Alaska Native health service professionals, and family advocates to develop the American Indian and Alaska Native Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness. The wallet-sized resource provides tips to enhance cultural competence for serving American Indian and Alaska Native communities.
- The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, which was funded by OFA from 2011 to 2020, developed a number of resources that address cultural competence. The following guides are now housed at fatherhood.gov:
  - Working with Latino Individuals, Couples, and Families.
  - Working with African American Individuals, Couples, and Families.
  - Working with Native American Individuals, Couples, and Families.
  - Considering Culture When Integrating Healthy Marriage Education Skills.
- The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse's Compendium of Curricula Used by Fatherhood Programs features culturally relevant curricula.
- The National Compadres Network has resources for work with Latino youth and families.
- The Native American Fathers and Families Association provides resources for work with Native American families.

Working With Fathers To Enhance Relationship Skills

> "The legal basis and public support involved in the institution of marriage helps to create the most likely conditions for the development of factors that children need most to thrive—consistent, stable, loving attention from two parents who cooperate and who have sufficient resources and support … Marriage is not a guarantee of these conditions, however, and these conditions exist in other family circumstances, but they are less likely to." [139]

"Growing up in a healthy, safe marriage is generally the best situation for children. However, when this is not possible, children can also thrive if the parents cooperate and the father remains involved and responsible." [141]

"We cannot focus on just the children and view parents as only a conduit to serve them. That approach to stopping generational cycles of poverty and incarceration has not worked. When we work to build healthy families by including the parents with relationship education and support services, we change a culture and establish a new legacy for generations to come." [141]

In recent years, the responsible fatherhood field has expanded beyond its roots in employment and parenting services for low-income fathers, recognizing the need to also help fathers enhance their relationship skills.[142] Research indicates that children raised by both parents in low-conflict homes achieve better scores, on average, for a host of indicators.[143] Non-residential fathers face various communication and relationship challenges that can affect engagement with their children and willingness to pay child support.[144] By providing services to help fathers communicate openly in healthy, cooperative parenting relationships, programs can improve potential outcomes for children, irrespective of their parents' living arrangements.

Fathers need to be able to successfully navigate different types of relationships, including spouse-partner, co-parent, parent-child, and workplace relationships.

[139] Parke, M. P. (2003, May). *Are married parents really better for children? What research says about the effects of family structure on child well-being.* Center for Law and Social Policy. http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/states/0086.pdf

[140] Jones, J. (2008, June 25). *Fatherhood and marriage: What's the connection?* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/fatherhood-and-marriage-whats-connection-nrfc-webinar

[141] Tijerina, R., Tijerina, C., & Tijerina, B. (2013). *High five: Love never fails.* The RIDGE Project.

[142] Klempin, S., & Mincy, R. B. (2012). *Tossed on a sea of change: A status update on the responsible fatherhood field.* Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being, Columbia University School of Social Work. http://crfcfw.columbia.edu/files/2012/09/OSF-Fatherhood-Survey_Final-Report_9.25.12_SK_RM.pdf

[143] MDRC. (2011). *Supporting healthy marriage toolkit: Resources for program operators from the supporting healthy marriage demonstration and evaluation.* http://www.mdrc.org/publication/supporting-healthy-marriage-toolkit; Parke, M. P. (2003). *Are married parents really better for children? What research says about the effects of family structure on child well-being.* Center for Law and Social Policy. http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/states/0086.pdf

[144] McHale, J., Waller, M. R., & Pearson, J. (2012). Coparenting interventions for fragile families: What do we know and where do we need to go next? *Family Process*, 51, 284–306. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22984970

Types and Complexity of Relationships

Living Arrangements of Parents and Children in the United States in 2013

- Seventy-six percent of American parents living with children under the age of 18 were married, 16 percent had no partner present, and 8 percent were cohabiting with a partner.
- Among parents living with an unmarried partner, two-thirds (66%) share a biological child with their partner.
- Of all children under the age of 18:
  - Sixty-four percent were living with two married parents.
  - Four percent were living with two cohabiting parents.
  - Twenty-four percent were living with only their mother.
  - Four percent were living with only their father.
  - Four percent were not living with either parent.
- There were differences among subgroups:
  - Fifty-five percent of Black children were living with one parent.
  - Thirty-one percent of Hispanic children were living with one parent.
  - Twenty-one percent of non-Hispanic white children were living with one parent.
  - Thirteen percent of Asian children were living with one parent.[145]

Some fathers live with their children and their children's mother, some do not. Many fatherhood program participants have never been married, have separated or divorced, or have remarried, and many have struggled to maintain effective co-parenting relationships with the mother or mothers of their children. Remaining engaged in their children's lives is more challenging for fathers if they never had or no longer have a romantic relationship with their child's mother. Regardless of whether their parents are married, living together, separated, or divorced, children will have a better opportunity to have a close relationship with each of their parents if the parents have a healthy, cooperative relationship.

Conflict or violent relationships between parents, including emotional, psychological, or physical abuse, negatively affect children. Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to experience a range of problems, including difficulty forming and maintaining relationships, mental health issues, and aggression and conduct problems.[146] In working with fathers or couples, programs should recognize that intimate partner violence is real, harmful for all parties, and possibly exists in some participants' relationships. Any indicators of domestic violence should be addressed immediately.

[145] Child Trends DataBank. (2015, March). *Family structure: Indicators on children and youth.* Child Trends. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/family-structure-indicators-children-and-youth-child-trends-data-bank; U.S. Census Bureau. (2013, November 25). *About three in four parents living with children are married, Census Bureau reports* [Press Release]. U.S. Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/archives/2013-pr/cb13-199.html

[146] Wolfe, D. A., Crooks, C. V., Lee, V., McIntyre-Smith, A., & Jaffe, P. (2003). The effects of children's exposure to domestic violence: A meta-analysis and critique. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 6, 171–187.

Divorced and never-married fathers who do not live with their children often struggle to maintain effective co-parenting relationships and they may have children with more than one mother, which further complicates their situation.

Low-income fathers often face the additional challenge of not having sufficient education, skills, and other resources to bring to their relationships, making them less likely to be able to provide financially and build and maintain healthy relationships.[147] Likewise, the stresses and anxieties that come with poverty can negatively influence relationships between partners and between parents and their children.[148]

Practitioners should help fathers develop the competencies needed for healthy relationships, whether they involve long-term romantic commitments, marriage, or co-parenting arrangements.

Non-Residential Fathers

In recent decades, increasing numbers of children live apart from their fathers. In some cases, their parents have divorced or separated after marriage; in others, their unmarried parents have separated or never lived together.

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, which followed a cohort of nearly 5,000 children born in large U.S. cities between 1998 and 2000 (roughly three-quarters of whom were born to unmarried parents), sheds light on the relationships of low-income, unmarried parents.[149] The vast majority of unmarried fathers in the study indicated they were romantically involved with their child's mother at the time of the child's birth. About half of these couples were living together and another third were living apart but romantically involved, and most said they wanted to stay together and eventually get married.[150]

Despite these positive expectations for the relationship at the time of the child's birth, within five years, only one-third of the couples were still together. Because low-income, unmarried parents often have new partners and father additional children, these families tend to be very complex and unstable. Issues contributing to the instability include low economic resources, lack of employment options, mutual gender distrust, cultural norms that support single motherhood, and psychological factors that make maintaining healthy relationships difficult.[151]

Definitions of romantic involvement vary. One ethnographic study that interviewed fathers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Camden, New Jersey, revealed that a significant number of the men did not actually have meaningful relationships with the mothers of their children before the pregnancy and birth of the child. Often, the child motivated these men to make a more serious effort to create a family with the mother, but in the end, most of the men were not successful. Typically, these fathers had not really chosen the woman but "ended up with her because a baby was on the way." [152]

[147] Edin, K., & Nelson, T. J. (2013). *Doing the best I can: Fatherhood in the inner city.* University of California Press.

[148] Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., & Knox, V. (2010). Marriage and fatherhood programs. *The Future of Children*, 20(2), 205–230. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ901829.pdf

[149] Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. (2014). *About the fragile families and child wellbeing study.* https://fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/about

[150] TDonahue, E., Garfinkel, I., Haskins, R., McLanahan, S., & Mincy, R. B. (2010). *Strengthening Fragile Families.* Brookings Institution. http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2010/10/27-fragile-families-foc;
McLanahan, S., & Beck, A. N. (2010). Parental relationships in fragile families. *The Future of Children, 20*(2), 17–37. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3053572/pdf/nihms275674.pdf

[151] Ibid.

[152] Edin, K., & Nelson, T. J. (2013). *Doing the best I can: Fatherhood in the inner city.* University of California Press.

> "The old-fashioned 'package deal'—where the adult relationship takes priority and men's relationship with the children comes second—has been flipped. The fact that it's now mainly about the baby [for non-residential fathers], and the mother is seen principally as a conduit to the child, is what is at the heart of the relationship's fragility." [153]

The types of relationship issues faced by non-residential fathers may vary according to whether they ever lived with the mother and child or whether they ever developed a romantic relationship with the mother. Practitioners should consider the differences between "front-end" mother-father relationships, in which there never was a lasting or developed romantic connection, and "back-end" relationships that featured meaningful romantic connections over a number of years. The dissolution of back-end relationships is likely to be more intense and contentious.[154]

While practitioners may need to help fathers in front-end relationships shift their focus away from the child to better understand the mother's point of view, practitioners working with back-end fathers often need to start by asking those fathers to first acknowledge their negative feelings about the ex-partner or spouse and then focus on what is best for their child. In both cases, the bottom line is to help non-residential fathers understand the importance of developing a cordial, empathetic relationship with their co-parent. Frame the issue around what is best for the children, instead of focusing solely on a father's concerns about his rights or what makes him happy.[155]

[153] Ibid.

[154] McHale, J., Waller, M. R., & Pearson, J. (2012). Coparenting interventions for fragile families: What do we know and where do we need to go next? *Family Process*, 51, 284–306. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22984970

[155] Vecere, E. (2010, November 16). *Integrating healthy marriage skills in fatherhood programs* [Webinar].National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/integrating-healthy-marriage-skills-responsible-fatherhood-programs-nrfc

Additionally, many of these fathers must navigate blended family dynamics as they or the mother of their child engage in new romantic relationships. Conflict with an ex-partner is an issue that can affect the relationships in a blended family. Whether deliberate or not, ex-partners can cause conflict and strain the residential parents' relationship, which can hinder effective co-parenting.

Practitioners who understand these complex relationship dynamics will be better prepared to design appropriate interventions for the fathers they serve. For example, fathers who do not have meaningful connections with the mothers of their children will need help to gain the motivation and skills to build a strong relationship, whether a long-term romantic commitment or cooperative parenting alliance. Men in off-again/on-again relationships and those who have ended a relationship acrimoniously will be in special need of negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills. The most opportune time to help these fathers enhance their relationship with the mother is before or soon after the birth of their child.

Residential Fathers

While individual circumstances vary greatly, fathers who live with their child's mother tend to work more hours and earn higher wages than fathers who are not married or cohabiting.[156] Stable employment and sufficient earnings can help promote and sustain healthy relationships, but working and striving to provide can also cause relationship strains.

In working with residential fathers, practitioners can reinforce the positive impact that healthy relationship skills can have on outcomes for children and parents. Although these couples are together in the same home, the quality of their relationship may vary greatly. Some may have a meaningful connection and commitment, while others might be stuck in negative or abusive patterns and struggling to make it work for the sake of the child. Cohabiting couples tend to be younger and have less college education than married couples, and cohabiting fathers tend to have lower incomes and are slightly less likely to be employed than married fathers (77% compared to 90%).[157] Consequently, cohabiting couples may need more support to build economic stability, including job training and placement, as well as financial education to better manage less income and fewer resources.

> "While some programs said that emphasizing to fathers how their child will benefit from their participation was a key motivator, others found that it was the unique, primary focus on the couple relationship that was the major attraction because so few programs for low-income families consider the couple relationship, and there was a palpable hunger for these kinds of services." [158]

[156] Warland, C., Jones, J., Philipp, J., Schnur, C., & Young, M. (2013, November). Healthy relationships, employment, and reentry. *National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Research Brief.* National Transitional Jobs Network. http://www.scribd.com/doc/185476721/Healthy-Relationships-Employment-and-Reentry

[157] Child Trends DataBank. (2015, March). *Family structure: Indicators on children and youth.* Child Trends. https://fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e000001199.pdf

[158] Ooms, T., & Hawkins, A. J. (2010). *What works in marriage and relationship education programs? A review of lessons learned with a focus on low-income couples.* National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/What-Works-in-Marriage-and.pdf

Married and cohabiting couples have as much to gain from services to enhance their relationship skills as parents who are separated or divorced or were never married. For instance, they can learn and practice positive communication and conflict-resolution skills and gain an understanding of why and how to create a low-conflict family environment for their children. As with unmarried, non-resident fathers, building relationship skills can be especially beneficial prenatally or just after the birth of a child, when support and encouragement may be particularly welcome.

Multiple Parenting and Blended Families

Many fatherhood program participants balance complicated situations and relationships. They may live with some, but not all, of their biological children; they may be an adoptive parent or step-parent; and they may have children who live in several different households.

Multiple parenting relationships occur when parents have children with more than one partner and can increase relationship strains with serious consequences for children. Women who have children with multiple partners tend to maintain physical custody of the children, while men tend to live only with the children of their current cohabiting partner. Fathers in those situations are faced with competing demands on their time and resources, which often results in their spending less time with children from former relationships and providing less financially.[159] One study of low-income fathers who were living with a partner and her children showed these men often used their very limited resources to help provide and care for those children, making it even harder to save money for their own biological children.[160]

Multiple parenting relationships also have consequences for the parents. Because of their responsibilities for children in other households and the complicated relationships they have with the mothers of those children, men in multiple parenting relationships tend to be less "marriageable" or less likely to be viewed as desirable life partners by new partners.

When fathers divorce and then re-marry, the result is a blended family with step-parenting challenges. Children typically spend time in both of their parents' homes and have to forge relationships with their parents' new partners. Step-parenting can lead to stress and conflict in the new marital relationship, as well as between ex-spouses and between parents and children.

[159] Manlove, J., Logan, C., Ikramullah, E., & Holcombe, E. (2008). Factors associated with multiple-partner fertility among fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(2), 536–548. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6738949/pdf/nihms-1018812.pdf

[160] Edin, K., & Nelson, T. J. (2013). *Doing the best I can: Fatherhood in the inner city.* University of California Press.

What Fatherhood Programs Can Do

Most fatherhood programs engage participants in conversations and introspective activities designed to help them acknowledge their need to change certain behaviors and enhance key life skills. Once fathers are open and motivated to change, programs need to be ready with tools and resources to help them meet their goals. To enhance relationship skills, fatherhood programs can work with participants in group sessions and one-to-one case management. Unlike marriage and relationship enhancement programs that target individuals and couples, fatherhood programs tend to work mainly with fathers on their own. Although experienced practitioners recognize the advantages of including partners, it can be hard to do, especially when participants have to struggle to establish or re-establish good relations with the mothers of their children.

Many fatherhood programs offer educational and/or peer support groups that include sessions on communication, conflict resolution, and other relationship skills that are useful in many kinds of relationships. These skills can help fathers strengthen ongoing relationships and forge successful co-parenting relationships. Fathers might need help to figure out how to put their children first, see their children's mother through their children's eyes, and recognize that they must communicate effectively and coordinate parenting activities for the sake of their children. In some cases, mediation and/or co-parenting classes may be ordered by a family court judge as part of a divorce agreement or by a child welfare worker in connection with a child protection case.

Since the early 2000s, the federal government and a few state governments have provided funding for marriage and relationship enhancement programs to help individuals and couples, especially unmarried parents, gain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to have healthy marriages and overcome relationship difficulties. Various curricula are available to help structure group or home visiting sessions. These curricula typically include skill-building lessons on conflict resolution, communication, financial literacy, family safety, and parenting. The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families compiled a Guide to Low-Cost Curricula that offers information on relationship curricula plus tips for assessing and selecting materials appropriate for different program settings. The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse also has a Compendium of Curricula that includes information on relationship curricula used by some fatherhood programs.

Fatherhood programs also have approached relationship skills-building by:

- Scheduling couples sessions for married, engaged, or cohabiting couples.
- Holding group sessions with expectant fathers.
- Conducting home visits with new mothers and fathers.
- Ensuring that case managers focus on relationship issues in individual meetings.
- Using curricula that include activities to address relationship skills or combining such activities with other program activities. In some cases, mothers and/or children are invited for a specific session or included in social activities such as picnics, outings, and other program events or celebrations.
    - Activities with children give fathers opportunities to practice parenting and relationship skills and receive feedback later from instructors and peers.
    - When mothers are present, program staff can engage both members of a couple in skill-enhancement activities.
- Stressing the value of developing nurturing relationships with your children and your partner or spouse.

> "Learning to forgive is key to building a strong, healthy family. Without the ability to forgive, we create an emotional vacuum that can never be filled." [161]

> "She's a child. She knows normal from us. She needs to understand that yelling and screaming when you have a problem is not the best way to handle things." [162]

Understanding Key Relationship Skills

Although many fatherhood programs and curricula focus on improving communication skills, other relationship skills are equally important. Healthy relationships also require trust, support, commitment, friendship, and shared goals and expectations. Partners should respect and admire each other and share mutual appreciation regularly. Taking steps to build a strong, stable friendship and nurture loving feelings helps couples weather the storms that are bound to arise.[163]

However, many couples fall into negative and toxic interaction styles, by giving harsh criticism, for example, or showing contempt with eye-rolling, put downs, sarcasm, name-calling, and other disrespectful behavior that can be particularly detrimental when conducted in front of children. Such behavior is the opposite of empathy—the ability to understand your partner's feelings and imagine what it is like to walk in their shoes—which is an important quality in healthy relationships.

- Communication skills that are useful in many different types of relationships include:
  - Active listening.
  - Using I-messages (speaking for yourself, not others).
  - Making complaints in a positive way without criticizing.
  - Being supportive.
  - Showing appreciation.
  - Being honest and admitting when you are wrong.
- Behaviors that are damaging in any kind of relationship include:
  - Controlling actions.
  - Abuse of any type.
  - Toxic communication (such as showing contempt for your partner, putting him or her down with harsh criticism).
  - Not listening to or talking over the other person.
  - Hiding things from your partner or having secret relationships.

Father-child relationships require these basic relationship skills and many more because fathers must help nurture and guide their children from infancy to adulthood. Fathers also must understand how children learn from the behavior and actions of their parents.

[161] Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (1999). *The seven principles for making marriages work.* Three Rivers Press.

[162] Tijerina, R., Tijerina, C., & Tijerina, B. (2013). *High five: Love never fails.* The RIDGE Project.

[163] Office of the Attorney General of Texas, Division for Families and Children: Office of Family Legal Policy. (2010). *For our children: Learning to work together* [Video], and Co-parenting guide [PDF]. Office of the Attorney General. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/our-children-learning-work-together-co-parenting-guide

Developing Effective Co-Parenting Skills

One path to positive child outcomes is effective co-parenting that includes support and coordination among all the adults responsible for a child's care and upbringing. Effective co-parenting relationships also require cooperation, communication, compromise, and consistency among the adults. However, developing and maintaining such relationships among former spouses, new partners, and extended family members is not an easy task. Coordination can be even more complicated for unmarried men with children from multiple partners where the "co-parenting team" might include several former partners, a current partner, and family members and friends related to current and former relationships.

Fatherhood program practitioners should consider these factors, help fathers put aside old grievances, and encourage the development of co-parenting teams with all involved adults communicating, cooperating, and supporting each other as co-parents for the sake of the children.[164] Ideally, the fatherhood program can involve the mother directly. When not possible, the program might work with a partner agency, such as Head Start, if it has a relationship with the mother. Practitioners also can refer clients to a trained mediator or call the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse hotline (1-877-4DAD-411 or 1-877-432-3411) to facilitate mediation between the couple.

Spotlight on...

The **Center for Urban Families** in Baltimore, MD, emphasizes mediation activities to help parents build co-parenting relationship skills. Sometimes working with traditional third-party mediators, the program prefers non-traditional mediation activities designed to help parents gradually learn to cooperate with each other.

The program helps fathers understand the need to change some of their behaviors, and helps mothers see that the fathers are sincere in adopting new behaviors. In Art *With* a Heart, mothers are encouraged to come to the center and observe fathers and their children working together in a mosaic project. Center for Urban Families President and CEO Joe Jones noted, "Our fatherhood team has done a great job getting moms to understand that things are changing. That's not easy when a father may have told her a thousand times 'I'm going to change.' But our team gets moms to come in and see what we're doing."

The center also developed Couples Advancing Together, a pilot program that provided healthy relationship skills-building, employment assistance, and case management services for couples with children receiving public benefits through the Department of Social Services. The pilot, which operated from February 2015 to January 2019, featured a 6-week (12 sessions) curriculum, home visits, and long-term follow-up. Group sessions were led by skilled facilitators who created a learner-centered, positive, respectful, and comfortable environment that allowed couples to share their experiences and knowledge with peers. With assistance from family services coordinators and group facilitators, participants developed a family self-sufficiency plan to help them set family and career goals, compete in the job market, and develop family budgets. Transportation assistance, child care, and dinner for parents and their children were provided.

[164] McHale, J., Waller, M. R., & Pearson, J. (2012). Coparenting interventions for fragile families: What do we know and where do we need to go next? *Family Process, 51*, 284–306. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22984970

Parenting Apart – Tips for Co-Parents[165]

Share these tips with fathers to help them communicate more effectively with their co-parent and other adults involved in their children's lives:

- Point out what you have in common: "We're both worried about [Jessie's cursing]."
- Ask for help: "I need your input on [the cell phone] problem."
- Ask for advice: "What do you think about [Chris getting a weekend job]?"
- Be honest about how you're feeling: "I won't say this doesn't upset me, but I'll listen to you."
- Admit you got it wrong: "I misunderstood what you were telling me."
- Take responsibility: "I shouldn't have said it that way."
- List what you *can* do and plan the rest: "I can deal with [curfew] now. Can we decide on the [driver's permit when Jamie turns 16]?"
- Acknowledge your responsibilities: "I know it's my job to work out the [transportation], but can we discuss some details?"
- Take a step back and reflect: "Why do you think we keep fighting about [Rory's homework]?"
- Don't assume the worst of intentions: "I know you didn't intend to sound [mean], but when you talk like that I get [upset]."
- Brainstorm together: "What [bedtime] rules would work for both us and the kids?"
- Acknowledge how important the other person is: "What you say matters to me."
- Bring respect back into the mix: "I think you're a good parent. I like the way you [talk to] the kids."
- Don't shut down for good: "Can we talk about this next time I call? I need to think about it."
- Use "I feel____" statements: "I feel [upset] when you [laugh at my suggestions] because [I want to work with you on a solution]."

[165] Child Find of America. (2009). *Parenting apart: Communication skills.* http://childfindofamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Child-Finds-ParentHelp-Communication-Skills.pdf

Tips for Introducing a New Partner to Your Children[166]

When is the right time?
Introduce a new partner to your children when the relationship is happy, stable, and you are sure that the relationship has a future.

Role models for our children.
Kids learn about how to behave from us. Try to avoid exposing them to a succession of fleeting partners. Adults arriving and then leaving their lives, once they have become attached, can affect children's ability to form long-lasting relationships in the future. It can also be very unsettling for them.

Keep things slow and casual in relation to your children.
You may be excited by a new relationship but your children may feel frightened, threatened, angry, or confused. Respect their feelings. Take things slowly. When it feels right to introduce them to a new partner, keep things as casual as you can. The message to convey is "this is mom or dad's boyfriend or girlfriend, not a replacement parent."

Talk to and listen to your children.
Before your children meet your new partner, talk to them and explain the situation. Then listen carefully to what they say and give them time to talk about anything they are worried about. Reassure them about how much you love them (they may be nervous, particularly if they sense that you are acting differently). They may fear that you will pay them less attention.

Include the children.
If your new partner also has children, your children may be more interested in them than they are in your new partner. Recognizing this and creating chances for the children to get to know each other and spend time together may help them adjust to the new situation.

Sleeping over.
Ideally, you should wait for your children to have met your partner on a number of occasions and hopefully everyone feels relaxed with each other before your partner stays for 'sleepovers' if the children are in the house. Tell your children that your partner will be sleeping over. Try to involve your partner in family meals rather than your partner only turning up when the children have gone to bed.

Spend time with your children.
Don't let time with your new partner consume all the time you spend with the kids. Make sure you still have plenty of one-to-one time with your children. During any transition or change, children are likely to need to see more of you.

Don't pressure or expect your children to feel the same way you do about your new partner.
Give your children space and time to form their own relationship with your new partner. Respect your children's feelings even if they are not what you'd like them to be.

Tips for Fathers in Stepfamilies

Parents in healthy families:

- Listen to each other.
- Address conflict directly and positively.
- Share information.
- Participate in activities together.
- Nurture relationships by showing affection and paying attention to the words they use with one another.

Because stepfamilies face additional challenges, parents in healthy stepfamilies also:

- Maintain a cordial relationship with former spouses.
- Use compromise to resolve problems.
- Model healthy communication and commitment for the children.[167]

[166] Single Parent Action Network. (2014). *Introducing a new partner to your children.* https://www.onespace.org.uk/your-space/relationships/introducing-a-new-partner-to-your-children

[167] McBride, J. (2008). *Healthy communication in stepfamilies.* National Stepfamily Resource Center, Auburn University. https://www.stepfamilies.info/assets/uploads/2019/10/QS_Healthy_Communication_in_Stepfamilies_D.pdf

Spotlight on…

The **RIDGE Project** in McClure, OH, works with incarcerated fathers and their partners or spouses during the fathers' time in prison and upon their return to the community. In working with individuals and couples, the RIDGE Project stresses five key principles of healthy families:

- **Friendship** – Building lasting bonds through fun and laughter, and sharing life's struggles and victories while committing to being loyal.
- **Faithfulness** – Affirming your family's intrinsic value, and demonstrating steady allegiance to fulfilling your duty to protect, love, and defend them.
- **Forgiveness** – Moving beyond offenses from others to experience the freedom that comes from releasing others for the larger purpose of family strength.
- **Fairness** – Learning to see in your circumstances the opportunity to use effective communication skills to resolve conflict and strengthen your relationships.
- **Fortitude** – Facing danger and enduring pain or adversity together with strength of mind, will, and purpose.[168]

The **RIDGE Project** offers the following tips for building skills in these five key areas:

- **Friendship**
  - Affirm your admiration for your spouse and children by telling them each 10 positive things about themselves every day.
  - Tell your friends and family members at least three good things about your spouse every time you talk to them.
  - Schedule at least 1 hour a day of uninterrupted time to spend with your family. Focus on fun group activities that build friendship (build a fire, play a game, go on a walk, cook a meal together).
- **Faithfulness**
  - Make a list of things you can do to demonstrate your allegiance. For example:
    - Refrain from pointing out your spouse's faults.
    - Remain silent or say something encouraging instead of criticizing your loved one when he or she makes a mistake.
  - Pause and ask yourself these questions when you are tempted to be unfaithful in your words or actions:
    - Will this bring honor to my family?
    - Will this bring honor to my spouse?
    - Will this bring honor to me?
- **Forgiveness**
  - Make a list of people you need to forgive and a list of people you need to ask for forgiveness.
- **Fairness**
  - Write down examples of when you felt you were treated unfairly or dishonored by a loved one. For each instance, list the actions or words that were unfair and note what you would have wanted your loved one to say or do instead.
  - On a separate sheet of paper, list examples of when you have been unfair to a loved one. For each instance, indicate what you should have said or done instead.
- **Fortitude**
  - Make a list of the adversities your family has faced with fortitude and indicate how those obstacles have helped make your family stronger.
  - Connect with each member of your family once a week to ask if there is a difficult situation that they are facing.[169]

[168] Tijerina, R., Tijerina, C., & Tijerina, B. (2013). *High five: Love never fails.* The RIDGE Project.

[169] Ibid.

Spotlight on…

Healthy Families San Angelo in Texas, which operated from 1998 to 2019, focused on:

- Supporting healthy mother-child and father-child interaction.
- Supporting healthy child development.
- Increasing family functioning by improving couples' relationship and problem-solving skills.
- Increasing each parent's ability to provide financially through education, job training, and employment services.

Services began prenatally or at the birth of the child and included home visits, group sessions, social activities and family outings, and connections to other community services. The Dads Make a Difference program was designed to help fathers connect emotionally with their children. In addition to the overall family services, fathers could participate in dad meetings and father/child play activities. Couple Time was a group-based service that brought couples together in a relaxed atmosphere to discuss skills and information needed to build strong, productive relationships.[170]

[170] Wiseheart, G. (2009, June 23). *Responsible fatherhood in the context of marriage: Promoting healthy marriage activities with couples or single fathers* [Webinar]. National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/webinar/slides/june2009slides.pdf

Activities

These activities can all be found at https://www.fatherhood.gov/for-programs/program-activities

- *Reflection and Awareness*

Your Child's Perspective: The IALAC Story from Pamela Wilson

This short activity demonstrates the impact of parental conflict on children. The activity is designed to increase participants' motivation to work cooperatively with their child's mother and other parenting team members.

Journey – The Road You've Traveled from Pamela Wilson and Nigel Vann

This activity can be used in group sessions with fathers and in training sessions with staff to facilitate reflection on previous life experiences and encourage identification of ways these experiences have affected personal attitudes toward parenting, relationships, and marriage.

- *Communication Skills*

Active Listening

This 35-minute activity from *Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers* divides participants into pairs. A "speaker" discusses a problem with a "listener" who secretly was instructed to listen poorly. Group members then assess aspects of poor and good listening, and practice using effective listening skills in a role play.

Showing and Handling Feelings

This three-part activity from *24/7 Dad*™ takes about 100 minutes and helps fathers increase their awareness, knowledge, and capacity for showing and handling feelings and emotions. The final part of the activity focuses on showing and handling grief and loss.

Top Takeaways

- Complex family relationships often present challenges and opportunities that require more negotiation, communication, boundary setting, and conflict management.
- Services provided to enhance relationship skills for fathers need to take into account the variety of household and relationship structures within which fathers, children, and mothers live.
- Programs should focus on developing key relationship skills for fathers, such as effective communication, active listening, and empathy.
- Programs should emphasize the importance of effective co-parenting for the benefit of the child, and offer healthy parenting and communication tips to minimize the effects on children of any tension, stress, or conflict. This includes tips on when and how to introduce a new partner to children.
- Mediation services should be made available.
- Work with non-residential fathers should help them understand the importance of developing cordial, empathetic relationships with their co-parent.

Helpful Resources

- The co-parenting guide, **For Our Children: Learning to Work Together,** was developed by the Division for Families and Children in the Office of the Attorney General of Texas. It includes a 22-minute video, handbook, and sample co-parenting plan available in English and Spanish.
- The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, which was funded by OFA from 2011 to 2020, developed a number of resources that address healthy relationships:
  - **Encouraging Effective Coparenting in Blended Families** offers practical and easy-to-follow tips.
  - **Healthy Relationships, Employment, and Reentry** gives an overview of the evidence supporting the interrelatedness of employment, healthy relationships, family well-being, and recidivism. The research brief also features the perspectives of expert program practitioners who successfully integrate programs related to employment, prison reentry, healthy relationships, and responsible fatherhood.
  - **Building Strong Parenting Partnerships** reviews parenting styles, including two key elements of parenting: parental responsiveness (warmth or supportiveness) and parental demandingness (behavioral control).
  - **It's Not All about Money: Non-Financial Ways Non-custodial Parents Can Help Their Families** suggests ways that safety-net service providers can help non-custodial parents explore non-financial mechanisms for participating in their children's lives.
  - **Tips for Understanding Military Couple Relationships After Deployment** summarizes what is known about the couple relationships of service members and recommends ways that safety-net service providers can help couples maintain successful relationships.
  - **Strategies for Helping Couples Build and Manage Assets** highlights mechanisms that low- and moderate-income couples can use to build assets and begin the journey to becoming debt free.
- The National Stepfamily Resource Center provides resources such as:
  - **Smart Steps**,a six-session curriculum designed for remarried or partnering couples and their children. The curriculum focuses on building couple and family strengths, while addressing the unique needs and issues that couples face in stepfamilies.
  - **Healthy Communication in Stepfamilies** gives tips for stronger communication.
- The North Carolina State University **Connecting for Families Curriculum** helps parents build healthy relationships with each other.
- The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse hotline (1-877-4DAD-411 or 1-877-432-3411) is a toll-free number where fathers and families can get information and referrals for direct assistance on a wide range of fatherhood issues. **What to Do When Co-Parenting Gets Tough: Stories from the NRFC Hotline** features examples of the types of calls fielded by the hotline.
- **The Supporting Healthy Marriage Toolkit: Resources for Program Operators from the Supporting Healthy Marriage Demonstration and Evaluation** includes tips and resources for programs working with couples. The toolkit was developed by **MDRC** based on the experiences of Supporting Healthy Marriage project sites.

Working with Non-Residential Fathers

Many of the men who participate in responsible fatherhood programs are not living with their children. Within the responsible fatherhood arena, fathers who are not living with their children are often referred to as non-residential or non-custodial fathers. Non-custodial fathers, however, are fathers who do not have legal or physical custody of children, even if they live with them. Fatherhood practitioners tend to prefer the term non-residential fathers, which avoids the implication that children are objects that a father might seek custody of or access and visitation rights to.

> "Many non-resident fathers struggle with various obstacles, such as unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, and physical and mental illness. Additionally, other challenges such as child support arrearage and conflict with children's mothers can cause personal and child access problems for fathers." [170]

The number of U.S. children living apart from their biological fathers has increased considerably over the last half century. In 1965, about 10 percent of all U.S. children and 25 percent of African American children lived with a single parent;[171] in 2011, these figures were around 28 percent and 51 percent, respectively. Although some non-residential parents are mothers, four of every five are fathers.[172]

Compared to the 1960s when divorce was the main reason children lived with a single parent, many children today have fathers who have never been married to or even lived with their mothers. Today's non-residential fathers face diverse circumstances. Young fathers, divorced fathers, and fathers who have no formal relationship with a child's mother all have different issues that require understanding and attention. The challenges are often compounded, especially for those who have children with more than one mother. Fatherhood programs should be aware of these challenges. On the one hand, divorce agreements may set some parameters, such as specifying child support payments and shared parenting arrangements. On the other hand, for never-married fathers, their role is often more complicated, particularly if they do not take steps to establish paternity. When working with non-residential teen fathers, additional challenges may come in building, maintaining, and navigating a relationship with their child's maternal grandmother, who may act as a gatekeeper between the mother and father. All non-residential fathers may face a period of redefining what it means to be a good father as they increase their involvement with a fatherhood program.

[170] Clark, R., & Cox, G. (2011). Fathers' voices in the child welfare system: Not about us without us. *Protecting Children*, 26(2), 6-9. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/fathers-voices-child-welfare-system-not-about-us-without-us

[171] Ellwood, D., & Jencks, C. (2002). *The spread of single-parent families in the United States since 1960*. John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

[172] U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). *Custodial mothers and fathers and their child support: 2011*. http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-246.pdf

Some non-residential fathers regularly spend time with their children and are fully involved in their children's lives. Others have varying degrees of contact. Some children see their fathers rarely or not at all. Others may:

- Live part of the time with each parent on a shared custody schedule.
- Stay with their fathers on weekends or during school vacations.
- Spend time with their fathers on occasional or fluctuating schedules.
- See their fathers according to formal access and visitation court orders or child welfare reunification plans that specify the times and conditions under which fathers have time with their children.

Fathers who have limited or irregular access often find it hard to bond with their children. Many feel resentment toward the child's mother, the child support system, or the court system because they perceive that individuals and agencies are biased against them. Although some fatherhood practitioners might be tempted to ally with fathers, this perspective can be counterproductive. Some fathers may find it hard to move beyond these feelings, which slows progress toward needed behavioral change.

Other fathers are non-residential because they are incarcerated or away temporarily on military or other work assignments.

The Importance of Establishing Paternity

Many unmarried fathers, particularly young fathers with low incomes, may try to avoid confirming paternity because they associate it with the establishment and enforcement of a child support order. While the two are linked, fathers should be aware that a child support order will only be established if requested by the custodial parent, or if the custodial parent applies for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), commonly known as cash assistance. In that case, the state is required to seek establishment of a child support order. More importantly, fathers should be aware of the importance of establishing their legal right to be involved in their child's life. Unlike married fathers, who are legally considered the father, unmarried fathers have no legal rights until they complete a paternity acknowledgment process, which varies from state to state. Once paternity is legally established, they can petition for various rights, such as custody, visitation, or the right to join in decisions about the child's education.

Programs can build trust with unmarried fathers by explaining how establishing paternity ensures their legal rights and various rights and privileges for their children, such as rights to inheritance, father's medical and life insurance benefits, and Social Security and veterans' benefits, plus access to paternal family health history.

Fatherhood practitioners can learn about their state's steps for establishing paternity and petitioning for legal rights by contacting their local or state child support office. Many fatherhood programs invite child support agency representatives to make presentations explaining the process for fathers and staff.

Fathers who have not legally established paternity often do not realize the limitations of their situation until they hear about another dad who is losing contact with his children. For instance, a father may find out that his child's mother is planning to move out of state, or a report of child abuse or neglect has led to child protection workers removing the child from the home. If a father has no legal certification of paternity, he has no recourse to object or request consideration for custody. Child welfare workers are required to undertake due diligence to find fathers, but not being named on the child's birth certificate can slow that process.

Sometimes an unmarried man believes he is the father of a child and agrees to sign a declaration of paternity, only to find out later that he is not the father. Although the subject might be difficult, dads might be advised to request a blood test before signing a paternity declaration if they have any doubts about whether they are the father.

Common Issues Faced by Non-Residential Fathers

Typical issues faced by non-residential dads in fatherhood programs include:

- Contact with their children.
  - Frustration that they are not more involved in their children's lives.
  - Lack of awareness of the importance of legally establishing paternity if they are unmarried.
  - Desire for more time with their children (access and visitation or custody issues).
  - Anger and resentment toward their children's mother.
  - Frustration with court or child support systems because they perceive, rightly or wrongly, that individuals and agencies are biased against them.
- Relationships.
  - Complicated relationships and multiple family or household responsibilities, which present challenges to meeting the needs of children.
  - Need for assistance in negotiating co-parenting.
- Child support.
  - Lack of knowledge about how to navigate child support and court systems.
  - Child support obligations that they struggle to meet.
- Employment.
  - Lack of job opportunities.
  - Lack of educational qualifications or appropriate job skills.
  - Inconsistent work history.
  - Other barriers to steady employment, such as housing, criminal history, or substance abuse issues.
  - Impact on ability to pay child support.

Some non-residential dads, particularly younger fathers, do not have steady housing, often moving around and sleeping on family's and friends' couches. "His residence may change every few weeks," one practitioner said. Unstable housing can complicate arrangements for spending time with children and getting communications and documents from child support agencies, social service providers, and fatherhood programs.

Fatherhood practitioners also report that many fathers were raised without a positive father figure. "Many of our dads didn't have a positive role model or dad in their life. This is a big hurdle for us," one practitioner noted. However, many fathers understand the impact of growing up without a father. They see the implications even more clearly once they participate in a fatherhood program, which can be a door to engagement. Brian Clark of the Opportunity Alliance in Maine explained, "Fathers often come to the fatherhood program with a deep well of frustration, shame, and hopelessness about becoming the absent dad they swore they would never be. Fatherhood programs can be the source of new hope as they begin to find their way back to their children."

Addressing These Issues through Fatherhood Programs

Helping program participants talk about their personal experiences and barriers, acknowledge the need for behavioral changes, and develop new life skills are essential steps for programs to be successful. Fatherhood programs should focus on:

- Effective case management to identify and address challenges. Facilitating opportunities in group or one-to-one discussions for fathers to talk about and vent their frustrations and resentments so they can begin to move forward.
- Assistance in understanding and navigating child support and family court systems.
- Dealing with employment barriers and helping dads move toward economic stability.
- Group sessions to build co-parenting, communication, and relationship skills.
- Effectively exploring child development so fathers understand what to expect of their children at different stages. This is especially important for dads who have not had contact with their children for extended periods of time and have not had opportunities to practice parenting skills.

Helping fathers obtain stable housing may be beyond the scope of many fatherhood programs. Some programs maintain an emergency fund to help program participants deal with urgent housing or transportation situations. Other programs connect participants with local service agencies that provide rent assistance or emergency housing. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness offers resources for addressing various housing barriers.

Facilitating Group and One-to-One Discussions

Fatherhood practitioners recommend gradual and ongoing conversations with non-residential fathers about the issues they face so they can better identify root causes and develop strategies to address barriers. For instance, feelings of frustration, anger, or animosity toward the mothers of their children may be related to child support payments that are beyond their immediate ability to pay and perceptions that the mother has "turned them in." Through education and training, fathers can learn more about the social welfare system and understand that their children's mother did not turn them in, but simply went through the requirements for them to receive financial benefits. They might also begin to understand the mother's perspective more and improve their ability to communicate with her without confrontation.

The opportunity to share experiences and reflect with other fathers facing similar situations can be valuable for non-residential dads to improve their economic situation and strengthen relationships with children and co-parents. Practitioners working with dads in these situations advise programs to let fathers air their frustrations—with the court system, child support, or the children's mother—then help fathers see the situation more objectively. Barry McIntosh of Young Fathers of Santa Fe said, "I help them get away from being wound up by the situation." Programs can help fathers understand how communication and listening skills can help them establish an effective co-parenting network for their children. Andrew Freeberg of the Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project cites the need to "keep the norms and expectations positive and respectful, in spite of the need to vent frustrations."

Beyond group and individual case management sessions, some programs cultivate peer support networks of dads who communicate regularly and work together. "Many of these men are in a social network that promotes things that aren't healthy for them," one practitioner said. "[Our] fatherhood program seeks to promote a new direction by setting up a series of social events." Movies, games, and father/child outings are examples of social bonding activities arranged by some programs.

During sessions with individual dads or when facilitating group discussions, experienced practitioners also suggest:

- Talk with dads in a compassionate way about the child support system and note that the child's mother is not acting punitively, but is looking out for her interests and those of her child.
- Help the dad think about how he might respond to certain issues or situations involving the mother of his child, from financial topics to child-rearing.
- Have ongoing conversations so men can hear from peers and learn how to react to common challenges they may face in the court system.
- Help manage any disappointment a father may feel as a result of child support orders or visitation limits. Help staff keep fathers hopeful when they confront such disappointments.

Addressing Child Support Issues

Some non-residential fathers have informal arrangements to provide financial support on a regular or irregular basis; others have formal child support orders specifying monthly amounts that they pay directly to the mother or through a child support enforcement agency. Fathers who provide informal support can be encouraged to keep receipts for purchases such as baby clothing or diapers. If they provide cash to mothers directly, they might pay with a money order or check so they have documentation of support provided. This may be helpful if a formal support order is ever established.

About half of fathers with formal child support orders fulfill their obligations on a regular basis. Approximately a quarter have the ability to pay, but choose not to do so and are sometimes referred to as deadbeat dads. The other roughly 25 percent have been referred to as "dead broke dads," who struggle to make ends meet, are unable to meet their obligations, and often build up substantial arrears.[173] For many fatherhood programs, dead broke dads are their typical participants. Practitioners report that these fathers generally want to support their children financially, but lack the means. Also, they may have children with multiple mothers, which further complicates their situation. In these cases, the best or most practical approach for fatherhood programs may be to begin with a focus on one child, often the youngest or the one with whom the father has the most contact.

Problems often arise when a child support order is too high relative to a non-residential father's income and other obligations (such as rent and household expenses or support for another family or child) or because arrearages are accruing interest at high levels. Initial child support order amounts often are set too high relative to income because fathers fail to appear for order adjudication. Amounts may become too high if a father neglects to inform child support of a reduction in income due to a change in employment status or incarceration.

Non-residential fathers might be motivated to participate in a fatherhood program if they believe the program and case manager can help them improve their employment situation and maintain regular child support payments. Programs should explain to fathers that attending hearings is important to ensure that correct employment information and any changes in income are considered. Having a connection with child support agencies can help fathers understand the process for modifying child support orders and ensure they know what forms are needed to notify the child support agency about a change in circumstances. A fatherhood program can help fathers complete the required paperwork, which can be cumbersome.

Establishing strong partnerships and maintaining contact with staff at the local child support office or family court, which sets child support orders in some states, can be mutually beneficial for all concerned. Fatherhood programs can help fathers complete necessary forms, obtain employment, and meet their child support obligations. Child support offices and family courts can help fathers understand the child support system, assign staff to work directly with program participants, or help with modification of orders and arrearages. Custodial parents may agree to accept a reduction of arrears owed to them if they know the fatherhood program is helping the other parent with employment and payment plans. Similarly, if arrears are owed to the state, arrangements could be made to reduce arrearages if satisfactory program participation and/or current payments are maintained.

[173] Sorenson, E. (1997). A national profile of nonresident fathers and their ability to pay child support. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59, 785-797; Tillis, C. D. (2011). *The difference between "deadbeat" and "dead broke" fathers.* Parents as Teachers.

Successful Partnerships with Child Support

The **Center for Urban Families** (CFUF) in Baltimore, Maryland, has a long-standing partnership with the local child support office. Child support staff provide a 2.5-hour Child Support 101 course that helps dads understand the system and how payments are calculated. Since the partnership began, support payments are up and 80 percent of long-term CFUF participants are paying child support. CFUF staff report that many men from the local neighborhood will sign up just to attend the child support course, and many will then stay to take advantage of other program components.

The CFUF partnership with child support also features a Payment Incentive Program designed to encourage and reward consistent child support payments. Through the program, fathers establish payment plans, manage gradual reduction of arrearages, and have driver's licenses reinstated that may have been revoked for support non-payment. If fathers meet their current child support payments for 12 consecutive months, state-owed arrears are reduced by 50 percent; after 24 months, arrears can be reduced by 100 percent.

Rubicon in Richmond, California, has a partnership with the local Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) whereby DCSS:

- Facilitates monthly DCSS workshops at Rubicon sites to educate staff and participants, promote services, and dispel myths typically associated with child support.
- Assigns a dedicated staff member to meet with Rubicon program participants.
- Reviews support orders to establish appropriate modifications based on non-custodial parents' current circumstances.
- Negotiates arrears payments to make them manageable for the non-custodial parent, reviews accounts for any discrepancies, and releases drivers' licenses for active program participants.
- Coordinates training to cover issues such as custody or visitation.
- Provides paternity establishment services.
- Assists with child support enforcement cases outside the county and state.

Connections to Success in Kansas City, Kansas, has a partnership with Kansas Child Support Services (KCSS). KCSS reduces child support arrearages up to $2,000 based on number of hours of fatherhood program participation. An additional $1,000 reduction is available for fathers who obtain their GED or a commercial driver's license. KCSS also provides fatherhood program participants a $2 reduction in child support arrearages for every $1 they invest in a 529 college savings plan. The **Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project** in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has a similar arrangement with the local child support offices in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Arrears owed to the state can be forgiven over time for fathers who complete parenting training and continue to make consistent payments of at least part of the amount owed.

"Fatherhood practitioners should always have a relationship with their local child support office. This is vital as child support offices are likely to be less rigid with their enforcement tactics regarding your clients … For many of our clients, their experience of child support and other public agencies is that 'you walk through a minefield,' so they have a low level of trust with public institutions." -Cedric Petteway, CFUF

More Ways to Collaborate with Child Support Agencies[174]

- Articulate child support language and concepts on a level your program participants can understand.
- Check with your local child support office for enrollment in e-child support, which can help dads monitor, track, and make payments.
- Invite child support to facilitate workshops with your clients to:
  - Cover all aspects of enforcement and enable better management of their cases.
  - Debunk myths of child support as an adversary.
  - Increase dads' willingness to address and communicate with child support.
  - Enhance dads' overall knowledge and understanding of child support.

[174] Petteway, C. (2013, March 28). *Working with child support: Effective strategies from model state and local partnerships* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-child-support-effective-strategies-model-state-and-local

Dealing with Employment Barriers

Many fatherhood programs either provide employment services in-house or work in partnership with experienced workforce development programs to help men assess and build their strengths, look for work, receive training, and prepare for employment. Depending on individual situations, programs may stress education and training as prerequisites for a job search or focus on a "jobs first" approach that helps dads find temporary jobs to meet immediate financial obligations while they continue to build their skills for future opportunities. Some programs address financial literacy and help dads learn to deal with child support, housing, and wise use of money.

Coordinating Efforts Relating to Employment and Child Support

The final report on Fathers at Work,[175] a national initiative that added fatherhood and child support services to six established employment programs, indicated that employment programs, fatherhood programs, and child support agencies can work together to:

- Offer fathers accurate information about child support.
- Convince fathers of the importance of providing formal support.
- Modify child support orders.
- Set reserve or minimum child support orders.
- Consolidate petitions on multiple child support cases.
- Reduce penalties for arrears.
- Offer on-site paternity establishment.
- Assist with other issues as needed.

[175] Spaulding, S., Grossman, J. B., & Wallace, D. (2009). *Working dads: Final report on the Fathers at Work initiative*. Public/Private Ventures.

From Ashley, S. (2001). *Fathers are forever: A co-parenting guide for the 21st century.* Santa Clara, CA: Divorced Fathers Network.

The Dozen Keys to Successful Mediation (p. 146)

- Almost all divorced men go through a period of time when they experience anger, humiliation, and fear. Most feel unprepared, unprotected, and financially insecure—even suicidal. Men seeking escape from these feelings often overreact. (p.21)
- In the long run, we protect children by being honest about our feelings—so long as we're careful not to burden them with our emotions. Children need to be excluded from their parents' drama as much as possible. (p.35)
- Generally, children learn from their parents' actions. Listening and talking with them, giving hugs or verbal validations, and telling our children we love them—daily—does more to make them feel secure than anything else we might do. Gifts bought are quickly forgotten, but the intimate moments shared by a father and his child will be long remembered. (p. 35)
- For children to have nurturing relationships with their divorced parents, fathers have to do their part to create a co-parenting relationship with the mother.... Children must witness a balance of power in order to respect both parents. (p.41)

From Klatte, W. (1999). *Live-away dads: Staying a part of your children's lives when they aren't a part of your home.* New York: Penguin Books

The Dozen Keys to Successful Mediation (p. 146)

1. Stay calm.
2. Express your emotions.
3. Be yourself.
4. Tell the truth.
5. Know your kids.
6. Stick to the point.
7. Look at your own behavior
8. Talk about your former partner's strengths and your own.
9. Put the kids ahead of your anger.
10. Answer questions fully.
11. Admit your mistakes.
12. Compromise.

From Ricci, I. (1997). *Mom's house, dad's house: A complete guide for parents who are separated, divorced, or remarried* (2nd ed.). New York: Simon and Schuster.

Guidelines to Keep Kids Out of the Middle (p. 142)

- **Go directly to the other parent for information or an answer.** Keep your communications direct. Do not have your child become a messenger or spy, even if he or she wants to.
- **Don't bad mouth the other parent in their presence** or where they might overhear you, or where the children might hear you. Keep your frustrations for private conversations with good friends, your therapist, or a counselor.
- **Do not participate in your children's angry feelings about the other parent.** Let them blow off steam, but do not add your own angry comments, even though you may want to.
- **Encourage your children to speak about their difficulties with the other parent** to the other parent. Decline to get involved in lengthy advice. Suggest the names of close friends of the other parent if they need more "talking out" time. Children need safe adults to confide in.
- **Do not ask your children about the other parent's life or circumstances.** Give the other parent's motives the benefit of the doubt.
- **Do not ask children to keep secrets about you from the other parent.** If you do not want the other parent to know something, do not let your child know it either.

Top Takeaways

- Many of the men who participate in fatherhood programs are non-residential dads.
- Many non-residential dads face issues related to contact with their children, managing the relationship with their child's mother, child support, and employment. Some, particularly younger fathers, also might not have stable housing.
- When fathers have multiple children with multiple partners, focusing on one child can be a productive way for them to begin addressing issues.
- Fatherhood programs can help through:
  - Effective case management to help fathers identify and address challenges.
  - Explaining the benefits of paternity establishment.
  - Assistance in understanding and navigating child support and family court systems.
  - Workforce development programs to help men look for work, receive training, and prepare for employment.
  - Group sessions focused on co-parenting and communication and relationship skills.

Helpful Resources

- The **Focus on Fathering** curriculum includes *Parenting Apart*, designed to help non-residential fathers understand the important role they play in the lives of their children. Activities focus on the importance of effective communication with the resident parent and helping fathers understand the dynamics that make parenting apart difficult. A handout on communication keys is included.
- **Bringing Back the Dads: A Model Program Curriculum for Non-Resident Father Engagement** features *Dad as Healthy Parent: Taking Care of You.* This session focuses on helping dads see how their health and well-being have an impact on their role as fathers and affect their children. The goal is to help participants identify stressors in their lives and look at productive ways to reduce stress and stay healthy. Designed as a 2-hour session, it also can be adapted for a shorter time period.
- **What Do We Know about Nonresident Fathers?** is a briefing paper on non-resident fathers in the UK and the relationships they have with their children who do not live with them.

- Center for Family Policy and Practice has resources on child support for practitioners working with low-income fathers and families, including:
  - Child Support Basics: Information for Financial Education and Asset Development Programs.
  - Low-Income Fathers and Child Support Debt: A Primer for Financial Literacy and Fatherhood Service Providers.
  - Negotiating the Child Support System: Recommendations from a Discussion of Policy and Practice.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement provides useful information for custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and fatherhood program providers, including:
  - General information for custodial and non-custodial parents in Child Support Handbook: Information for Families.
  - A brochure for custodial and non-custodial parents on Establishing Fatherhood.
  - Information on how to modify orders when situations change in Has Your Income Gone Down? Protect Your Children and Yourself: Information for Families.
  - Contact information for state child support programs.
  - Child Support and Parenting Time: Improving Coordination to Benefit Children is a fact sheet that highlights states and counties that coordinate child support orders and parenting time agreements, which is important for unmarried parents who do not have systematic access to assistance in establishing parenting time orders.
  - The Hispanic Child Support Resource Center Hispanic Outreach Toolkit provides materials to inform parents about child support services. Includes posters, brochures, partnership letters, and other outreach materials to help child support professionals and community-based organizations communicate with their clients. Many are available in Spanish and all are free.
  - Changing a Child Support Order includes state-specific modules and presents information to help parents, and people who work with parents, better understand the child support review and modification process. The guide explains how parents can request to have their child support order changed when their financial situation changes. The guide confirms that if parents have a significant change in income or living situation, and they have a case with a child support office, they should contact that office as soon as possible to ensure that the child support order reflects the new circumstance.

> "Adolescent fathers must reconcile the contradictory roles of both adolescence and fatherhood." [176]

> "Contrary to the stereotype that unwed teenage fathers disappear at the first mention of pregnancy ...we now know that the fathers will become deeply involved when permitted, and that it is the exclusion from the fathering and decision-making process that causes stress among these young men." [177]

> "Today's young adults often become parents before they have finished their education, gotten a stable job, and married. As a result, many American children are born into families headed by young, unmarried, and underemployed parents who often go on to have children with other partners." [178]

Working with Young Fathers

A central focus of fatherhood programs during the 1980s and 1990s was helping young fathers (ages 16–25) deal with the challenges of parenthood. This work, which built on efforts to assist teenage mothers, demonstrated that contrary to stereotypes, many young fathers are involved in the lives of their families and will participate in fatherhood programs if the services are designed to meet their needs. Assisting young fathers remains a key, even primary, component of many fatherhood programs.

Challenges Young Fathers Face

"Young males who become fathers while still in their teens are faced with the choice of either avoiding paternal responsibilities or attempting to face such responsibilities at the same time as they cope with the developmental tasks of adolescence, school completion, and labor market entry." [179]

While they face the same demands as all new fathers—to support the mother and baby—young fathers in their teens and early twenties face additional demands as they move from adolescence into adulthood. They may not have finished high school, and they often are not married or even living with the mother of their child. They also may feel excluded from the father role by the mother or the mother's parents. In some cases, a young father's own parents may try to discourage him from being involved due to financial or other concerns. In addition, these challenges have been compounded since the mid-1970s by structural changes in the economy, which have led to declining wages and reduced job opportunities for young men, particularly low-income minority men with limited schooling.[180]

[176] Kahn, J. S., & Bolton, F. G., Jr. (1986). *Clinical issues in adolescent fatherhood* (pp. 143–4), in Elster, A. B., & Lamb, M. E. (eds). *Adolescent fatherhood.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[177] Robinson, B. (1988). *Teenage fathers* (p. 60). D.C. Heath and Company.

[178] McLanahan, S., Garfinkel, I., Mincy, R. B., & Donahue, E. (2010). Introducing the issue. *The Future of Children*, 20(4), 4. Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution.

[179] Sullivan, M. (1990). *The male role in teenage pregnancy and parenting: New directions for public policy.* Vera Institute of Justice.

[180] Edelman, P., Holzer, H. J., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men.* Urban Institute Press.

A review of research in the 1980s showed that teenage fathers and mothers at that time often had unrealistic childrearing attitudes and a misunderstanding of children's developmental milestones, such as when they should begin walking, talking, or toilet training. Young parents also tended to be emotionally and intellectually unprepared for parenthood and showed impatience and intolerance, which often leads to physical means of disciplining children.[181]

A 2002 study with fathers aged 17–23 indicated that the most important factor predicting their postnatal involvement was the quality of the relationship with their partner during pregnancy. Although couples were overwhelmingly positive about their relationship during the pregnancy, younger fathers were less likely to be significantly involved with their children within nine months of the birth. While 76 percent of fathers aged 22–23 were very involved, this was true for only 20 percent of 17-year-olds.[182] Similarly, a 2013 study concluded that many young fathers:

- Are coping with complex identity changes.
- Experience significant financial hardship.
- Require legal advice to maintain contact with their child.
- Benefit from relationship support to maintain contact with the mother.
- Need parenting advice as much as mothers, but tailored to a male audience.[183]

The Transition to Fatherhood in Young Men

Findings from Research Conducted by the University of Bristol[184]

- Parents of young fathers and mothers were often ambivalent about the pregnancy, and one third of the new maternal and paternal grandparents responded negatively when the news was first broken to them.
- Interviews with young men at about five months into the pregnancy showed that 71 percent felt positively about the pregnancy, but 66 percent had no clear image of themselves as fathers.
- The vast majority of couples said they were generally compatible, moderately to highly committed, and that their relationship had a moderate to high level of stability.
- Young men often felt excluded from involvement with pre- and post-natal care by health service professionals.
- Health care professionals often knew little about the fathers, did not see them as central to their task, and felt they lacked the skills to engage with men.
- Nine months after the birth of their child, 69 percent of couples were living together, while 37 percent of men were not significantly involved as fathers.

[181] Robinson, B. (1988).

[182] Quinton, D., Pollock, S., & Golding, J. (2002). The transition to fatherhood in young men. *Research Briefing 8.* Economic & Social Research Council. http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2006/the-transition-to-fatherhood-in-young-men-influences-on-commitment/

[183] Cundy, J. (2013). Are we nearly there yet, dad? Supporting young dads' journeys through fatherhood. Bernardo's. https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e000002638.pdf

[184] Quinton, D., Pollock, S., & Golding, J. (2002).

Despite these challenges, most young fathers are involved in the lives of their children during the first 2–3 years of their child's life, but the majority become less involved as their children get older, which can have a negative effect on their children. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study of unwed parents, many of whom were under the age of 26, showed that half of the parents were living together at the time of their child's birth and another third were living apart but romantically involved. However, five years later only a third of parents were still romantically involved, and 50 percent of the nonresident fathers had little to no contact with their children.[185]

This decreasing involvement is likely the result of a complicated mix of personal, relationship, community, societal, and public policy issues.

Reaching Out to Young Fathers

Outreach and recruitment with young fathers may need to be designed differently than strategies for reaching out to older fathers. Understanding who they are and what their world is like is critical. Many practitioners recommend first identifying and addressing any personal or organizational stereotypes that portray young fathers as unconcerned, aloof, sexually exploitative, or eager to avoid responsibility during and after the pregnancy. Based on research and input from practitioners working with young fathers, no evidence supports these stereotypes.[186]

Rather, the initial reaction of young men, particularly teenagers, when they first learn that they are to become a father is often shock and confusion. They may experience depression and anxiety about the health of the mother and child, their relationship with the mother, the impact on their personal freedom and leisure time, and their ability to complete school or find employment.[187] Although they could benefit from participation in a fatherhood program or other family support services, they are unlikely to actively look for help unless there is a highly visible program in their community or they have heard of such a program from friends. Even if they have heard of a local fatherhood program, they may be uncertain or suspicious of the program's goals, particularly if they have heard other young fathers talk about child support responsibilities.

Active community outreach by understanding, caring staff is needed to reach these fathers. Barry McIntosh of the support group Young Fathers of Santa Fe said, "[When I meet] a new father, one of my first tasks, after being sure to listen closely to what he has to say, is to ask him if he wants to be involved in his child's life. Most say yes. Then we cover the rights and responsibilities, stressing the importance of establishing paternity and having your name on the birth certificate."

[185] McLanahan, S., & Beck, A. N. (2010). Parental relationships in fragile families. *The Future of Children,* 20(2), 17–37. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3053572/pdf/nihms275674.pdf

[186] Healthy Teen Network. (2014). *Fast facts: The unique needs of young fathers.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e000000977_0.pdf; Gavin, L. E., Black, M. M., Minor, S., Abel, Y., Papas, M. A., & Bentley, M. E. (2002). Young, disadvantaged fathers' involvement with their infants: An ecological perspective. *Journal of Adolescent Health,* 31, 266-276; Achatz, M., & MacAllum, C. (1994). *The young unwed fathers pilot project: Report from the field.* Public/Private Ventures. http://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/young_unwed_fathers_pilot_project_report_from_the_field_the; Robinson, B. (1988); Sander, J. H., & Rosen, J. L. (1987). Teenage fathers: Working with the neglected partner in adolescent childbearing. *Family Planning Perspectives,* 19(3), 107–110.

[187] Elster, A. B., & Hendricks, L. (1986). *Stresses and coping strategies of adolescent fathers* (pp. 55-60), in Elster, A.B., & Lamb, M. E. (eds).

Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills

Young Fathers of Santa Fe helps the mother and father build a positive co-parenting relationship, avoiding the courts if possible. The program helps parents establish a parenting plan that includes ground rules to guide how and when they communicate. For example, Johnny Wilson, one of the case managers, points out that texting or talking via phone can lead to individuals "getting mad" or saying something they might regret. He recommends "staying off the phone" and using email for most coparenting communication. He encourages parents to draft email messages and wait 24 hours so they can review from the other person's perspective before sending. If a young father doesn't have an email account, the program will explain how it can also be important for communication with employers or education providers.

Those who have worked with young fathers in New Zealand also stress this essential program component: "Support for teen [fathers] and [mothers] has missed out on support for them as a couple. A support program for young fathers cannot work in isolation from support programs for young mothers."[190] Although many U.S. practitioners have found that offering employment or child support assistance is a key recruitment tool, particularly for fathers in their 20s, the New Zealand practitioners found that the teen dads they worked with responded better to help with the emotional components of fatherhood: "love, care, and time."[191]

[190] Breiding-Buss, H., Guise, T., Scanlan, T., & Voice, T. (2003). *The support needs of teenage fathers* [Unpublished manuscript]. Father and Child Trust: Christchurch, New Zealand. Cited in Bartlett, D., & Vann, N. (2004). Review of the State of Practical Work (p. 88). *Supporting fathers: Contributions from the International Fatherhood Summit 2003*. Bernard van Leer Foundation. https://issuu.com/bernardvanleerfoundation/docs/supporting_fathers_contributions_from_the_internat

[191] Ibid.

Grouping Participants

Fatherhood programs must decide whether they will work with young fathers separate from older fathers or as part of mixed-age groups. Some practitioners believe that dads aged 20–25 can benefit from the experience of older fathers; others believe younger fathers, particularly those under the age of 20, benefit from programs or activities designed specifically for their developmental needs.

Adolescent males "tend to be idealistic in their thinking and often believe what happens to other adolescents can never happen to them," while "they are also struggling with their own identities and figuring out the course of their adult lives."[15] Teen fathers need special support and practitioners should expect gradual progress. Helping young fathers understand their inherent strengths, encouraging them to overcome barriers to involvement with their children, and providing support as they develop plans for growth are key program components.

Child Support Issues

Being ordered to pay child support until the child becomes an adult is especially challenging for adolescents and young adults who may have no means of providing financial support. Some states order minimal amounts if a father is still in school, but many young fathers struggle to make regular payments. Because unpaid child support can lead to overwhelming arrearages, fatherhood program staff should help fathers develop the means and motivation to pay their child support and help them modify support orders when necessary. Working with local child support offices and inviting child support representatives to speak with program staff and fathers are good strategies to ensure increased understanding of child support policies and procedures. If program staff know how to obtain and complete required forms, they are better able to help fathers navigate a system that can seem overwhelming. Similarly, working with child support staff as partners can make it easier to resolve issues before they get out of hand. Programs should also ensure that fathers know their parental rights, understand the benefits for themselves and their children of establishing paternity, and are familiar with basic terms and procedures if they need to go to court for custody or visitation.

Promoting Education and Training

Structural economic changes have led to declining employment opportunities and reduced economic stability and security for many young men. Although some young fathers decide to drop out of high school or forego other educational opportunities to find work so they can provide for their child financially, this is generally not a good long-term approach. As one practitioner has noted, this "all-too-common practice … is a trap. First, the amount of hours required to gain any reasonable income on the low wages paid will leave the father with little energy to put into his child or relationship. Second, the long-term financial prospects for child and family look much more positive for fathers with tertiary qualifications." [192] Fatherhood programs can encourage young fathers to complete high school or obtain a GED, get post-secondary education and training, and pursue apprenticeships or other methods of getting skills needed to earn a living wage. One good strategy is to form partnerships with community colleges and other agencies that can help young men work toward educational or vocational goals.

[192] Breiding-Buss, H., Guise, T., Scanlan, T., & Voice, T. (2003). fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/support-needs-teenage-fathers-unpublished-manuscript

Using Social Media

To connect with young fathers, practitioners must go where young fathers are—both physically and virtually. Research on usage of social media such as Facebook and Twitter found that 65 percent of adults and 90 percent of young adults (ages 18-29) used social media in 2015 (compared with 7 percent of adults and 12 percent of young adults in 2005),[193] indicating that fatherhood programs should seriously consider ways to connect with current, prospective, and graduating clients via social media and the internet. However, the 2015 data also showed significant income and education differentials. Seventy-eight percent of those living in the highest-income households and 70 percent of individuals with some college education reported using social media in 2015, compared to only 56 percent of those in the lowest-income households and 54% with a high school diploma or less.

This indicates that fatherhood programs should begin by asking current program participants and other young men in the community about their internet and social usage. Find out how they get news and messages and ask what is the best way to communicate with them. It is likely that social media is one of several tools that may be effective for program purposes of outreach and communication. For example, in addition to community outreach, programs should consider:

- Developing and updating websites with program information and useful tips and resources.
- Disseminating information through electronic newsletters and blogs.
- Including photos, infographics, and other images to enhance the engagement of young fathers.
- Using text messaging, apps, and social networking tools to stay in touch with program participants and remind them of upcoming events.
- Using video and music to deliver messages that resonate with young fathers.
- Using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to spread the word about program activities and achievements.
    - Content that delivers quick and simple messages and pictures of fathers with their children can grab attention.
    - Tagging your organization or tweeting relevant fatherhood topics or images can help build awareness of program services.
    - Ask graduates and former participants to "Like" or forward your posts to friends to increase the organization's name recognition.

Many fatherhood programs now maintain websites and communicate with fathers through social media. For instance, Young Fathers of Central Florida maintains a website with information on programs and upcoming events and the Dads Club at Vista Community Clinic in Vista, California, used their Facebook page to post tips for dads and share examples of short Ad Council videos from www.fatherhood.gov. See Spotlight on … Young Fathers of Santa Fe and NewYoungFathers.com for additional examples.

Practitioners and fathers can also engage with the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) on Facebook (Fatherhoodgov) and Twitter (@Fatherhoodgov). The NRFC Facebook page, which went online in 2012, gained 100,000 followers within 18 months and over 240,000 by October 2016.

[193] Perrin, A. (2015). *Social networking usage: 2005-2015*. Pew Research Center. http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/08/2015/Social-Networking-Usage-2005-2015/.

Delaying Other Pregnancies

One issue that fatherhood programs have not always addressed sufficiently is delaying additional pregnancies. While this issue affects many dads, young fathers who are trying to acquire basic education and job skills are particularly affected. Having more than one child at a young age multiplies the challenges young men and their children face. Almost one-half of men who father a child as a teen have more than one child by the time they are 22–24.[194] Fatherhood programs could provide information and help fathers and their partners communicate about ways to actively plan, time, and space future births so they happen by choice, not by chance. For example, programs can:

- Educate fathers on the importance of pregnancy planning and effective birth control methods.
  - Resources are available from national organizations such as the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, Advocates for Youth, and Planned Parenthood.
  - Community reproductive health agencies are potential partners. They could help with referrals and staff of these agencies could be invited to speak to groups of fathers or hold sessions in neighborhood clinics so young men will know about, and feel comfortable accessing, their services.
- Include pregnancy planning in case management. One way to start this conversation is to ask fathers to identify when and under what circumstances they would want additional children. If they want to prevent another pregnancy until they are better prepared to support another child, they can use condoms correctly and consistently, initiate conversations with sexual partners about birth control, and negotiate the use of effective birth control.
- Encourage fathers who are in committed relationships or married to the mothers of their children to work together with their partner to plan future pregnancies. This provides an opportunity to strengthen their relationship by sharing responsibilities and making joint decisions about what they want to accomplish individually or as a couple before enlarging their family.
- Help fathers who are not in committed relationships think about the impact of unplanned pregnancies and the challenges that can accompany having another child outside of a stable relationship. Talking about attaining educational or employment goals that lead to increased financial stability; connecting them with mentoring programs or post-secondary education and training opportunities; and generally providing caring guidance can be particularly helpful.

[194] Scott, M. E., Steward-Streng, N. R., Manlove, J., & Moore, K.A. (2012). *The characteristics and circumstances of teen fathers: At the birth of their first child and beyond.* Child Trends Research Brief, No. 2012-19. Child Trends. http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Child_Trends-2012_06_01_RB_TeenFathers.pdf

> "Because many men are visual, seeing and holding their child for the first time at the birth is deeply affecting and can create a foundation for continued involvement in the child's life."
>
> Barry McIntosh, Fathers New Mexico

Tips from Veteran Practitioners

- Recognize that many young or low-income men have been let down by adults in their lives. Often they test the staff at support programs to determine if they are "for real." Staff need to be sincere, approachable, and nonjudgmental.
- Encourage staff to be strong role models or mentors who display attributes the young men are trying to achieve. Young fathers often get "hooked" on support programs because a certain staff member provides support and encouragement.[195]
- Develop relationships with community agencies that can assist with housing, substance abuse, and legal issues. Young fathers will sometimes need additional support in accessing these services.
- Challenge young fathers to share their new knowledge and skills through peer education or a speakers' bureau. Participants can be empowered by sharing information about their experiences and the lessons they have learned in the program. Peer networking can help young men find jobs and prevent premature parenthood if young fathers counsel others to delay parenthood until they are ready to support a child.
- Connect with young fathers as early as possible, preferably before the child's birth. Prenatal education classes with the mother or classes with other expectant fathers can provide information and skills to prepare young dads to support the mother and child. Encourage young fathers to be present and actively support the mother during the birth.
- Assist fathers in getting family support. Young men are often blamed for an unplanned pregnancy by the mother's parents and even by their own parents.
    - Help fathers understand and appreciate the feelings of others.
    - Advise them to be patient and show the grandparents their commitment to being an involved father.
    - Look for opportunities to connect with the grandparents and help them understand the importance of fathers in the lives of their grandchildren. Such opportunities may be created through home visiting programs, Early Head Start programs, prenatal classes, or teen mothers' support programs.

[195] Bronte-Tinkew, J., Burkhauser, M., & Metz, A. (2008). *Promising teen fatherhood programs: Initial evidence lessons from evidence-based research*. [NRFC Research Brief]. National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e0000001449.pdf

Spotlight on…

Fathers New Mexico

Launched in 2009, Fathers New Mexico operates in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico, with a mix of local funding and donations. With a staff of three, including a case manager bilingual in English and Spanish, the program supports young fathers and their partners during and after pregnancy. The program uses mentoring, education, and group activities to establish trust, runs weekly support groups at various community locations, and helps with education and job placement. They utilize Facebook as a means of direct engagement with participants and have found this can help identify areas of stress and provide opportunities to provide additional support. Young Fathers of Santa Fe connects with about 150 dads each year and works with other family members whenever possible. The organization supports the mother-father-child relationship; connects with fathers early in the pregnancy; encourages childbirth preparation, parenting, and relationship training; and facilitates employment, housing, education, and legal support.

> *"When I found out I was going to be a father [at 21], I had to make some conscious decisions about my behavior. I soon found out that I couldn't afford to buy both liquor and diapers." - Andre Dandridge, NewYoungFathers.com*

NewYoungFathers.com

In 2005, Andre Dandridge heard from his uncle, Christopher Dandridge, about a young father who shot and killed one of the mothers of his children, wounded another, and eventually took his own life. Andre remembered, "At the time, Chris and I were both young fathers and agreed that maybe if this young man was given information designed to help young fathers, this tragedy may have been avoided."

In 2009, Andre and Chris launched NewYoungFathers.com, and a few years later began to provide services and support for young fathers in Lansing, Michigan, using innovative music and video to reach.

> *"The best thing I can say to help a young man is for him to know that we do not come here knowing anything, all things have to be learned; life is a learning experience from the beginning to the end … you can learn from the experiences of others … A man who can learn from his mistakes is a smart man; a man who can learn from the mistakes of others is a wise man." - 67-year-old father on NewYoungFathers.com*

"What advice would you give a young dad raising a newborn?"

Sample responses to question posted on Fatherhoodgov Facebook page, March 4, 2014.
Of 78 responses, 18 percent emphasized patience.

Presence over presents.	It don't take a genius, just love and patience!	Do everything you can for that child and enjoy every minute of it.
Hold them. Hold them. Hold them. Let them melt into your chest, let them squirm into the hollow under your neck. Feel their breath and let them hear your great big heart. Stare at them while they sleep. Whisper your hopes and dreams to them. Wonder at the tiny fingernails and little toes … Fall deeply in love.		Diapers and wipes, you can never have enough of those two items.
Take lots of photos … make a memory box … let the baby choose when to start potty training.	Cherish the magic moments … every single nanosecond.	Expect to be utterly exhausted. Expect baby vomit and dirty diapers … Sleep and nap together. That rest and bonding is far more important than a clean house or unfinished project.
Read to your child 30 minutes a day. By the time he reaches kindergarten [he will have] learned 500 words or more.	Give all the love you can. They aren't little but one time.	Turn T.V. off and spend time with your baby, as much as you can, they grow fast … set a good example to be a man and gentleman.
Love that child to the fullest and be in their life as much as possible!	It is the most mind-altering and gratifying experience in life. To watch your kids grow and mature before your eyes is the greatest experience in life and too many men miss it!	
Be gentle - be patient - be loving - always be there.	Best thing you can do that can change your life when you put your love into it.	Love their mother, turn off your cell phone … save money, and, remember, they watch EVERYTHING YOU DO … EVERYTHING.
Be the person you want your child to be!!	Mucha muchisima paciencia.	Do a college investment plan, it's called 529 college investment. It only costs $100 to start it and you can do it at any federal credit union.

Top Takeaways

- Contrary to stereotypes, many young fathers are involved in the lives of their families and will participate in fatherhood programs if services meet their needs.
- Active community outreach by understanding, caring staff is needed to reach these fathers.
- Young fathers will need help with education, employment, parenting, and relationships. They may also need assistance with housing, substance abuse, and legal issues.
- Teenage fathers may benefit from participation in programs or activities that are designed specifically for their developmental needs and held separate from older fathers.
- Many young or low-income men have been let down by adults in their lives. Often they test staff to determine if they are "for real." It is important for staff to come across as sincere, approachable, and nonjudgmental.
- Staff members should be strong role models who display the attributes that young men are trying to achieve.
- Family support is critical, so try to work with other family members. Without the support of family on both sides, young fathers may have trouble getting and staying involved. Help fathers understand and improve their relationships with extended family members.
- Encourage young fathers to be involved during the pregnancy and at the birth.
- To connect with young fathers, go where young fathers are—both physically and virtually. Beyond community outreach, stay connected by using social media and other electronic communication.
- Help young men and couples gain the motivation and capacity to plan and space any additional pregnancies. Reach out to local reproductive health centers and use online resources to design and deliver appropriate information for young men and couples.

Helpful Resources

- ROAD to Fatherhood: How to Help Young Dads Become Loving and Responsible Parents by Jon Morris (2002) presents real stories from young fathers together with strategies to help other fathers. The book features sections on planning, selecting qualified and empathetic staff, recruiting participants, evaluating curricula, promoting services, and celebrating a father's love for his child.
- Teen Dads: Rights, Responsibilities and Joys by Jeanne Warren Lindsay (2008) covers parenting basics, with tips and resources drawn from interviews with 52 young fathers.
- The Transition to Fatherhood in Young Men by David Quinton, Sue Pollock, and Jean Golding (2002) was part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Youth, Citizenship and Social Change project, which aimed to improve understanding of the way young people aged 16–25+ make the transition to adulthood and examined the support and resources they need to become effective citizens of the 21st century.
- Promising Teen Fatherhood Programs: Initial Evidence Lessons From Evidence-Based Research by Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew, Mary Burkhauser, and Allison Metz (2008). This NRFC research brief presents 10 promising practices for working with teen fathers.
- Fast Facts: The Unique Needs of Young Fathers offers information and resources from the Healthy Teen Network.
- Supporting Young Fathers in Their Parenting Journey by Nigel Vann (2015). This Youth Today publication provides additional tips and resources for programs working with young families.

> "To be successful, family strengthening services for prisoners require coordination between criminal justice and human service agencies, which often have divergent goals and contrasting perspectives." [196]

> "Our job is not to *fix* the people we serve; our job is to *equip* the people we serve." [197]

Statistics and Impact of Incarceration for Fathers and Families

The number of fathers in U.S. jails and prisons has increased four-fold since 1980.[198] Among the more than 684,500 parents who are incarcerated in federal and state prisons, 92 percent are fathers.[199] Each year, hundreds of thousands of people are released from state and federal facilities, and many more return to local jail facilities.[200] Ninety percent of all inmates will be released and 70 percent are likely to come back to the community where they were arrested.[201]

Many of these men grew up without the presence of a responsible father and often have complex family structures, employment problems, mental health issues, and substance use histories that impact their reentry success.[202] They face challenges in various areas, including establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, acquiring relevant job skills, obtaining employment, locating housing, managing child support obligations, and understanding their voting and general citizenship rights.

Given these challenges, it is perhaps not surprising that many former inmates return to prison. A recent recidivism study indicated that 49 percent of federal prisoners released in 2005 were rearrested for a new crime or rearrested for a violation of probation supervision conditions; 32 percent were reconvicted; and 25 percent returned to prison.[203] Similarly, although rates vary by state, nearly 25 percent of former state prisoners are reincarcerated in state correctional facilities within the first year of release.[204] A 2018 study documented the high prevalence of continued criminal justice involvement for people that were formerly incarcerated in state prisons. An estimated 83 percent of people formerly incarcerated in prison were rearrested at least once within 9 years of release.[205]

[196] Herman-Stahl, M., Kan, M. L., & McKay, T. (2008). *Incarceration and the family: A review of research and promising approaches for serving fathers and families* (p. SP-2). RTI International. http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/mfs-ip/incarceration&family/report.pdf

[197] Tijerina, R. (Presenter). (2007, November 14). *Promising practices: Working with incarcerated fathers* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/promising-practices-working-incarcerated-fathers-nrfc-webinar

[198] Herman-Stahl, et al. (2008).

[199] Maruschak, L. M., Bronson, J., & Alper, M. (2021). *Parents in prison and their minor children.* U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf

[200] U.S. Department of Justice, Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. (2014). *Prisoner reentry.* U.S. Department of Justice. https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu_reentry.html

[201] Gosnell, K. (Presenter). (2007, November 14). *Promising practices: Working with incarcerated fathers* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/promising-practices-working-incarcerated-fathers-nrfc-webinar

[202] McDonald, H. S., Herman-Stahl, M., Lindquist, C., Bir, A., & McKay, T. (2009). *Strengthening the couple and family relationships of fathers behind bars: The promise and perils of corrections-based programming.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/MFS-IP/Corrections-Based/rb.shtml

[203] United States Sentencing Commission (2016). *Recidivism among federal offenders: A comprehensive overview.* https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2016/recidivism_overview.pdf

[204] Urban Institute (Webpage). *Returning home: Understanding the challenges of prisoner reentry.* https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center/projects/returning-home-study-understanding-challenges-prisoner-reentry

[205] Alper, A., & Markman, J. (2018). *Update on prisoner recidivism: A 9-year follow-up period (2005-2014).* U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf

However, it is encouraging to note that prisoners who participate in employment, education, or substance abuse treatment programs are more likely to obtain employment and less likely to return to jail or prison.[206] Similarly, although family strengthening programs are scarce (parenting skills classes, the most common service available, are received by only an estimated 11 percent of fathers in state prisons[207]), studies indicate that such programs have improved attitudes about the importance of fatherhood, increased parenting skills, and led to more frequent contact between fathers and their children.[208] There are also indications that relationship enhancement interventions can improve communication skills and that people who are able to maintain family ties during incarceration fare better when released than those without such ties.[209]

When a father is incarcerated, there are repercussions not only for himself, but also for his coparent, children, and family.[210] Children of incarcerated parents tend to suffer from stress, trauma, and stigmatization and often exhibit a broad variety of behavioral, emotional, health, and educational problems that are compounded by the pain of separation.[211] Families and caregivers are also subject to emotional, financial, and physical stress and often struggle with conflicting expectations when the parent returns.[212] On any given day, an estimated 2.7 million children have a parent who is in prison or jail (that is 1 in 28 of all children).[213] Over 50 percent of them are age 9 or younger[214] and, although estimates vary, somewhere between 5 and 10 million children in the United States are affected by current or past parental involvement with the criminal justice system.[215]

[206] Urban Institute (Webpage). *Returning home: Understanding the challenges of prisoner reentry.* http://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center/projects/returning-home-study-understanding-challenges-prisoner-reentry

[207] McKay, T. (Presenter). (2012, July 12). *Effective strategies for working with fathers returning from prison* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/effective-strategies-working-fathers-returning-prison-nrcf-webinar

[208] Herman-Stahl, et al. (2008).

[209] Herman-Stahl, et al. (2008); Bobbitt, M., & Nelson, M. (2004). *The front line: Building programs that recognize families' role in reentry.* Vera Institute of Justice. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/front-line-building-programs-recognize-families-role-reentry

[210] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Marguerite Casey Foundation. (2008). *Children of incarcerated parents fact sheet.* Annie E. Casey Foundation. http://www.aecf.org/resources/children-of-incarcerated-parents-fact-sheet/

[211] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2008); LIS, Inc. (2002). *Services for families of prison inmates.* U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/017272.pdf

[212] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2008); La Vigne, N. G., Naser, R. L., Brooks, L. E., & Castro, J. L. (2005). Examining the effect of incarceration and in-prison family contact on prisoners' family relationships. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice,* 21(4), 314-335.

[213] National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated. (2014). *Children and families of the incarcerated.* http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/nrccfi-fact-sheet-2014.pdf

[214] Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2008). *Parents in prison and their minor children.* https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/parents-prison-and-their-minor-children

[215] National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated. (2014); Child Trends. (2015). *Parents behind bars: What happens to their children?* http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=parents-behind-bars-what-happens-to-their-children&utm_source=E-News%3A+Child+Trends%27+top+10+of+2016&utm_campaign=E-news+12%2F15%2F16&utm_medium=email

Minority children are disproportionately affected by father imprisonment: in federal prisons, 49 percent of fathers are African American and 28 percent are Latino; African-American children are six and one-half times more likely to have a parent in prison than are white children.[216]

By helping fathers build on existing father-child relationships or create new bonds with their children and families, prison-based fatherhood programs can have an impact on child and father well-being, strengthen family and community connections, and reduce the chance of recidivism.

This section of the toolkit provides examples and tips for ways in which fatherhood programs can work with correctional facilities to support fathers while they are incarcerated; offer pre-release support to prepare for successful reentry; provide direct supportive services in the community for returning fathers and their families; and work with community partners to help coordinate support for families while the father is incarcerated.

The Context of Prison-based Work with Fathers

- In corrections-based fatherhood programs, the average participant is likely to be in his late 20s or early 30s; divorced, separated, or never married; a user of drugs in the month before arrest; and someone who never finished high school.[217]
- Fathers in state prison are likely to be slightly younger than fathers in federal prison and less likely to be married or to have ever been married.[218]
- A recent report indicates that only 23 percent of state prisoners are married, but many are involved in intimate or coparenting relationships.[219]
- Forty-four percent of fathers in state prisons and 55 percent in federal prisons reported living with at least one of their children prior to imprisonment, and a slightly lower percentage (36 percent in state prisons and 47 percent in federal prisons) had lived with their children in the month prior to their arrest.[220]
- Many incarcerated fathers have child support obligations that far exceed their ability to pay.
- A majority of parents in both state (62 percent) and federal (84 percent) prisons are held more than 100 miles away from their last place of residence.[221]
- Incarcerated fathers on average spend 7 years in state prison and 9 years in federal prison.[222]

[216] Herman-Stahl, et al. (2008); Glaze L. E. & Maruschak, L. F. (2010); Mumola, C. J. (2000). *Incarcerated parents and their children.* U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/iptc.pdf

[217] Mumola, C. J. (2000).

[218] Ibid.

[219] Herman-Stahl, et al. (2008).

[220] Mumola, C. J. (2000).

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid.

Providing Services in a Correctional Environment

Approaches to work in correctional settings bear some similarities to community-based fatherhood programming. For instance, the general approach of helping men reflect on their past experiences in order to identify barriers and develop goal-oriented solutions can certainly translate to corrections-based programs. However, incarcerated fathers are likely to come to fatherhood programs with higher levels of guilt or shame concerning their past behavior and consequently may need additional assistance to address issues of low self-esteem and negative thinking about themselves.

> "Providing services to incarcerated men is challenging and demanding because providers have to balance facility safety and security priorities while meeting the human service needs of this population." [223]

Experienced practitioners have noted that inmates have frequently thought about what life will be like on the outside and may be unwilling to face some or all of their challenges. Many develop an unrealistic view of what home life will be like when they return and are often unaware, or even unwilling to admit, just how much prison life has affected them. The impact of "institutionalization" or spending time incarcerated can be significant and may make the transition to home life very difficult.

In prison-based fatherhood programming, helping fathers set realistic goals to improve their parenting and relationship skills may lead to other post-prison goals, including finding employment and becoming self-sufficient.

Practitioners recommend the following actions to help design and deliver effective programming for incarcerated fathers:

- Select appropriate curricula or modify curricula to be relevant to the target population. The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse's Compendium of Curricula Used by Fatherhood Programs features several curricula designed for work in prison settings. Base role-playing activities on hypothetical, rather than real, situations.
- Include male and female facilitators of different races.
- Utilize in-person parent-child visits, video visits, and other visiting supports.
- Help dads develop relationship and coparenting skills to better work with the mothers of their children, and include coparenting as a subject in relationship education classes.
- Provide community support services for mothers, partners, coparents, children, and family members before and following the father's release.
- If possible, provide links to community services (e.g., housing assistance, mental health services) upon release and develop relationships with local employers to help reentry dads with employment opportunities.

[223] McDonald, et al. (2009).

Common Themes

Whether a prison-based fatherhood program is operated directly by a department of corrections or in partnership with a community-based fatherhood program, there are some common themes in the provision of services for incarcerated fathers:

- Helping fathers who have been in regular contact with their children maintain that contact and gain new skills to deepen their understanding of child development, strengthen father-child bonding, and prepare for reunification.
- Providing coaching before and after phone calls to help dads effectively communicate with children.
- Guiding men through a process of self-reflection that focuses on acknowledging their past experiences and developing motivations that lead to cognitive readjustment.
- Guiding men who have not been in regular contact with their children through a process of self-growth that helps them consider ways to be more involved.
- Exploring definitions of masculinity and ways of relating to children and families.
- Helping fathers understand the impact of their previous behavior and current incarceration on their children.
- Helping fathers develop and enhance their parenting and relationship skills.
- Providing opportunities to practice skills through activities, such as role-plays, that allow fathers to fully understand their own feelings and those of their children.
- Preparing fathers for community reentry and family reunification.

Staffing Recommendations

Special skills are needed to deliver an effective program for incarcerated dads. Practitioners recommend hiring staff members who are:

- Unflappable and firm, yet approachable.
- Patient—practitioners will undergo detailed background checks before starting a program, plus searches whenever they visit a prison. It's also important to understand that it takes time to engage with fathers and help them realize change.
- Adaptable—a planned 90-minute workshop may suddenly need to be squeezed into half the time, with no advance notice. Also note that practitioners may not be allowed to bring typical workshop materials like paper and markers into a prison setting.
- Empathetic—staff need to relate to participants, earn their trust, and guide them through a process of self-reflection and learning. Although some state corrections agencies do not permit people who have been incarcerated to come back into facilities to teach classes, some programs look for staff with lived experience (i.e., formerly incarcerated or justice-involved people).

Child Support Assistance

Until recently, 25 states treated incarceration as "voluntary unemployment"[224] and, while some states had developed procedures to notify new inmates of the need to modify their support orders, many incarcerated fathers continued to accrue child support debt because they did not know how to modify their order upon imprisonment.

[224] Center for Family Policy and Practice. (2017). Policy Briefing: February 2017. https://cffpp.org/our_publication/policy-briefing-february-2017-2/

Although the federal Office of Child Enforcement ruled on December 20, 2016 that states may no longer "exclude incarceration from consideration as a substantial change in circumstances," states still have significant flexibility in setting orders for incarcerated parents and are only required to inform parents of the right to request a review "after learning that a parent who owes support will be incarcerated for more than 180 calendar days." [225]

It is therefore important, as with community-based fatherhood work, that fatherhood programs become familiar with relevant local and state policies; help incarcerated and reentry fathers understand these policies; and contact local child support offices to discuss procedures to assist fathers with establishing or maintaining parental rights, reducing support order amounts or arrears, and restoring driver's licenses upon release.

For example, staff of the New Hampshire Division of Child Support Services visit prisons throughout the state to help incarcerated parents with order modifications and, in Indiana, state agencies and fatherhood advocates have partnered to help newly incarcerated fathers request a modification of their support orders while in prison. The goal of the Indiana project was to reduce the support burden and give fathers more time to become financially stable after their release. "They would get so far behind on child support while incarcerated that they would hide out upon release," one official said. The project required extensive dialogue between the state Department of Corrections and Department of Child Support, which helped reduce barriers between the agencies. Both agencies signed a memorandum of understanding recognizing that incarcerated parents can play an important role in family reunification.

In some localities, child support offices may be able to help low-income noncustodial parents manage or reduce their child support debt. For examples, see New York City's Human Resources Administration's brochure Manage Your Child Support, which provides information on their policy, and the NRFC webinar series, which has featured three webinars (2013-16) on this topic.

For more information on child support policies, see the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) publication Realistic Child Support Orders for Incarcerated Parents and a companion chart "Voluntary Unemployment," Imputed Income, and Modification: Laws and Policies for Incarcerated Noncustodial Parents, which reviews practices, laws, and policies in different jurisdictions. To contact state child support agencies for more information on specific state policies, see OCSE's contact information for state child support programs.

[225] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). *The final rule: Flexibility, efficiency, and modernization in Child Support Enforcement programs.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/resource/final-rule-resources

> "Employment programs that emphasize 'soft skills' appear to be of limited utility in helping released and paroled offenders become employed. More promising approaches include job training opportunities." [226]

Job Training

Incarcerated fathers often need job training to plan their futures and support their children upon release. Occupational training, apprenticeship, and General Educational Development (GED) classes to earn credit toward a high school diploma are among the most useful options for dads. Some fatherhood programs also offer mentoring components, with trained mentors visiting incarcerated fathers as they prepare for release.

The RIDGE Project provides educational and employment services for incarcerated fathers in Ohio state prisons. Each father who completes the TYRO program, formerly known as Keeping FAITH, is eligible to participate in the organization's workforce ethics training, followed by job placement assistance services upon release. The organization has also offered welding training to help prepare fathers for welding jobs and developed a unique training opportunity whereby fathers can participate in a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program, which is provided behind prison walls for participants who would like to become truck drivers upon their release. PI&I Motor Express provides the tractor trailer truck used for instruction on prison grounds.[227]

Father-Child Interaction

Practitioners agree that supporting in-person or phone visits with children is important, but it can be hard to arrange. Not only is the physical distance between the prison and the children's home often a challenge, but also gaining entrance to the prison and feeling comfortable interacting with an incarcerated father can be difficult for children. "It hurts to think they know me as a criminal," one father said at a listening session in 2011. "How can I tell them to do differently than me, without feeling like a hypocrite?"

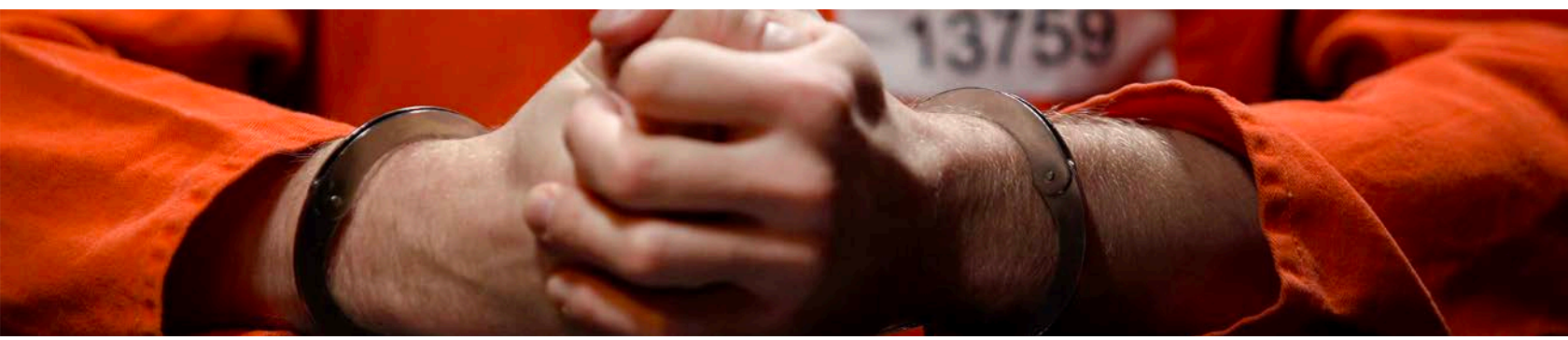
[226] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2006). *Working with incarcerated and released parents: Lessons from OCSE grants and state programs* [Resource Guide]. (p. vi). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-incarcerated-and-released-parents-lessons-ocse-grants-and-state

[227] Saint Wall Street. (2013). *The RIDGE Project: Socio-Economic impact report.* https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/ridge-project-socio-economic-impact-report

Some fathers do not want their children to see the prison setting; others either do not have access to a phone or find the cost of receiving or making calls too high. Some children may resist contact with an incarcerated dad. In other cases, a father may have multiple children with multiple partners. In such instances, it may be helpful to start with a focus on one child and one coparent, then gradually broaden the effort to more children.

Strategies that have worked for some programs include providing child-friendly visit centers, helping coparents with visitation expenses and logistics, and using parent-child visits as an opportunity to actively support participants in cultivating new parenting skills. Another strategy is to encourage dads to write letters to their children on a regular basis. Other approaches include facilitating art projects where dads create books or handkerchief art for their children or opportunities for dads to read to their child or sing and play a musical instrument over the phone or via audio or video recording.

Some programs include celebrations at the end of a fatherhood class when children and families are invited in for a session that includes food and interactive skill-building activities. In facilities that will permit such events, holidays are occasions to invite children and families for a party; a Father's Day cookout is another option. A caregivers' appreciation event can help dads honor family members who are helping to raise their children.



Developing Services in Correctional Environments

Several states and localities now offer programming for incarcerated parents with goals that include helping them stay in touch with their families and preparing them for reentry. Where these programs are available, fatherhood practitioners may be able to partner with local correctional facilities to enhance the services they provide, either during or after incarceration. In locations where these programs are not yet available, fatherhood practitioners can reach out to correctional facilities in the area to share lessons learned and encourage development of such programs.

Examples of services provided by state or local correctional departments include:

- The New Hampshire Department of Corrections' Family Connections Center provides parenting and relationship classes that have included opportunities for structured interaction between incarcerated fathers and their children through Skype video chats and the use of audio recorders.[228]
- The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections provides a Virtual Visitation Program that offers opportunities for inmates and their families to visit via videoconferencing from Virtual Visitation Centers in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Erie.
- The Shelby County Division of Corrections in Tennessee ran the 3R Project from 2007 to 2015 to help offenders "Rehabilitate, Renew, and Reconnect." Fathers participated in parenting classes that included restorative parenting lessons, tips on using "teachable moments" to promote their children's social skills, and opportunities for "child-friendly visits" with their children.[229] The Division also offers programs for all offenders prior to reentry, including vocational and educational training, mental health and substance abuse education, and life skills training.

[228] New Hampshire Department of Corrections, Family Connections Center. https://www.nh.gov/nhdoc/fcc/programs.html

[229] Bassett, J., & Lipford, S. B. *The 3R Project* [PowerPoint Presentation]. Shelby County Division of Corrections. http://shelbycountytn.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/485

Building Partnerships with Correctional Facilities

Some fatherhood programs have been successful in establishing ongoing relationships with local correctional facilities. For instance, Lutheran Social Services in South Dakota and the RIDGE Project in Ohio have helped fathers prepare for a return to their communities and families by providing parenting and vocational/educational services in correctional facilities throughout their states since 2006. These experienced practitioners advise that while it may take a while to gain the support of correctional agencies, demonstrating the impact of fatherhood programs on issues that are important to correctional facilities—such as increasing inmates' motivation to change behavior or reducing disciplinary violations—can encourage development of similar programs.

Offering informational sessions that provide overviews of available fatherhood services and projected benefits can help increase support. For example, many correctional facilities are faced with high staff turnover, which leads to staffing shortages and heavy workloads for some staff. If staff shortages lead to a cutback in prison programming, an independent fatherhood program might offer classes designed to build the parenting, relationship, and employment skills of inmates and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

If a community-based agency does not have a track record of working in correctional facilities, documenting other successful programs' outcomes may be helpful. For example:

- In Indiana, dads participating in parenting and occupational training programs had a recidivism rate that was nearly half the state average. The recidivism rate was one-third lower for men who received visits from a child or spouse. Male ex-offenders who were married or living with a partner were 12 percent less likely to commit a new crime than unmarried ex-offenders.
- The RIDGE Project in Ohio reported increases in healthy communication, stronger and healthier family relationship ties, a 5 percent recidivism rate at 18 months, and increases in positive behaviors overall among program participants.

Once you have support from key staff at a correctional agency or individual facility, you can begin to develop procedures for sharing information and encouraging fathers to participate in scheduled classes.

> "Understanding the culture and context of corrections is crucial for successful programming. Key considerations include: increasing numbers of incarcerated men and shrinking budgets, facility closures, overburdened and underpaid facility staff with low morale and high turnover, and safety concerns that reduce staff interest in programming."[230]

> "In the more successful partnerships, correctional staff understood that programming was a useful and constructive way for men to spend time and having men productively engaged in programming contributed to a safer, more stable facility. Some staff recognized the potential that family and fatherhood had to reduce recidivism, and having program advocates within corrections was powerful." [231]

[230] McDonald, et al. (2009).

[231] Ibid.

Identifying Potential Logistical Challenges

Identifying likely challenges and discussing them with facility staff during the planning stages will help program delivery go more smoothly. Fatherhood practitioners can anticipate the following challenges to providing services in a correctional environment:

- Access to meeting space may vary depending on day-to-day situations in the facility, and there may be interruptions in programming due to changes in meal times, calls for inmate counts, or lockdowns. Scheduling conflicts may also involve new work assignments or other programming.
- Because inmates may be transferred to another facility or granted early release, program completion can be hard for some participants, particularly in jails or other short-term facilities.
- Most correctional facilities do not allow visitors to bring in laptop computers or mobile phones, so program facilitators should plan to deliver class material without the use of a PowerPoint presentation. Some facilities allow visitors to bring in other workshop materials, such as books, markers, pens, and paper clips; some do not.
- While program staff with a criminal history can be effective in working with incarcerated fathers, they may have difficulty gaining clearance to enter some facilities.
- Obstacles to family strengthening efforts during incarceration and reentry may include the distance between a prisoner's place of imprisonment and his reentry community, inhospitable visiting rules, and barriers to partner and child involvement, such as transportation difficulties, busy schedules, and relationship strain.

Working closely with corrections staff can help you anticipate some of these potential problems and develop alternative approaches. For instance, if an inmate is scheduled for early release, it may be possible to assign him additional individual work or help him connect with a program in his community, so he can continue to progress toward fatherhood program goals.

Maintaining Regular and Positive Communication with Corrections Staff

Maintaining regular communication with corrections managers and line staff will help you identify potential issues and solutions. This could involve regularly scheduled meetings with agency managers, or the use of multiple methods of communication (email, phone, meetings, memos) to build relationships and stay in touch with line staff. If you can demonstrate to staff that your programming will make their jobs easier, it will be easier to schedule additional classes.

Lessons Learned for Meeting Institutional Constraints[232]

- Be prepared for anything and do your homework:
  - Demonstrate the value of the programming in a way that resonates with corrections staff. Show any impact the program has had on safety and facility operations (e.g., do program participants have fewer disciplinary violations?).
  - Develop support and buy-in ahead of time. Implement programming in facilities that support the program.
  - Diversify service delivery populations (e.g., parole, state probation, federal probation) to ensure that programming can continue if recruitment of a particular population is limited.
  - Stay flexible and be ready to adapt to unexpected facility changes or closures.
- More communication is better:
  - Schedule formal, regular meetings and communications with facility administrators.
  - Have more frequent and informal communications with facility line staff.
  - Use multiple methods to communicate with staff, including e-mail, telephone contact, weekly meetings, and administrative memoranda that program staff can reference.
  - Directly and frequently invite administrators to raise operational concerns to program leadership and then systematically address each issue.

Helping Dads with Reentry

Fathers leaving prison and reentering the community face often daunting challenges. They have to reconnect with their children, manage relationships with the mothers and coparents of their children, deal with child support obligations, find stable housing, get a job with a living wage, avoid the "old crowd," develop social skills, and train for better employment.[233]

Fatherhood practitioners recommend beginning the transition process long before a father leaves prison:

- Help fathers improve their self-awareness, knowledge, and skills in areas such as parenting, relationships, communication, and employment.
- Work with mothers and families. Provide couples with relationship skills classes if possible and establish links to community-based services the fathers can work with upon release.
- Help dads prepare for job interviews. Some practitioners recommend counselling men to be upfront with potential employers about their criminal record. Given current employment data systems, employers will likely find out about an applicant's past criminal record if he does not divulge it up front.
- Develop relationships with local employers, who may be open to hiring fatherhood program graduates.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Charles, M. (Presenter). (2012, July 12). *Effective strategies for working with fathers returning from prison* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/effective-strategies-working-fathers-returning-prison-nrcf-webinar

Employment Tips

Helping ex-prisoners obtain employment is not easy, but the following suggestions can help:

- Become familiar with the laws that affect employment of people with criminal histories.
    - Employers can receive a Work Opportunity Tax Credit by hiring ex-felons.
    - The Federal Bonding Program provides Fidelity Bonds that guarantee honesty for at-risk, hard-to-place job seekers with no cost to job applicants or employers.
- Employment programs that emphasize job-training opportunities appear to be more useful in helping released and paroled offenders become employed than programs that focus more on soft skills.[234]
- Provide wrap-around services to fully support participants before and after they are hired. This can involve developing and implementing an employment plan, providing support to overcome barriers such as transportation and housing, and following up to evaluate participants' success at the job over time.
- Research the requirements of local employers accepting job applications, such as:
    - Is a medical examination required? Does it involve urine testing or other screening for drug use? (As part of their employment programming, the Fathers Support Center in St. Louis, MO, conducts routine drug testing of participants before referring them to job interviews.)
    - Are applicants fingerprinted?
    - Does the employer run a routine check with law enforcement agencies for applicants' criminal records?
    - Does the employer obtain reports on applicants from a consumer credit reporting agency? [235]
- Ensure that participants are fully trained and ready for employment before recommending them to employers. Placing job-ready individuals could lead to the placement of more individuals in the future. If the first few fathers you place are not adequately prepared to fulfill the requirements of the job, it will be hard to maintain an ongoing relationship with that employer.
- Assure employers that you will follow up if any issues arise after a job placement. Employers are more responsive when they know there is an accountability measure in place.[236]
- Nurture relationships with employers to build a core group who see the ongoing value of working with your program. Work to eliminate the stigma of hiring ex-offenders and help companies realize they can bring on eager people who want to work and who want to learn new skills.
- Build relationships with companies, organizations, and employment agencies to develop internships and apprentice positions for people who were previously incarcerated.
- Create a job pool through personal relationships within the private and public sectors.

[234] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2006). https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/working-incarcerated-and-released-parents-lessons-ocse-grants-and-state

[235] Katuin, C. H., et al. (eds.) (2010). *A guide to facilitating employment for persons who are ex-offenders.* The Supported Employment Consultation and Training Center of Aspire Indiana Behavioral Health System. https://indianahelpers.com/PDFs/DOC_handbook_DOC_Version_2-26-10.pdf

[236] Lambert, B., & Lambert, K. (Presenters). (2012, April 26). *Achieving economic stability: Strategies for successfully connecting dads to jobs* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/effective-strategies-working-fathers-returning-prison-nrcf-webinar

Addressing Criminal History on a Job Application[237]

Applicants with a criminal history have at least four approaches they can take in addressing that history on a job application: Be prepared for anything and do your homework:

- Skip the question. This might lower the chance of getting an interview.
- Lie and say "no." Most companies now perform a background check on new hires and applicants. Lying on an application will almost always result in job termination or not receiving a job offer.
- Say "yes" and explain the crime. Depending on the type of crime and the explanation you offer, this may or may not be a good strategy.
- Say "yes" and write, "I can offer an explanation during an interview." Although admitting a prior conviction on an application may affect chances for an interview, this is generally the best option, as it shows integrity without disclosing too much information up front.

Applicants who choose to answer questions about their criminal history should:

- State the crime. Be honest, but do not go into specific details.
- Take responsibility for the crime. Do not blame others, mental health or substance abuse issues, or life experiences. Most people have had hard times in their lives, but not everyone has committed a crime.
- Show remorse and empathy for any victims.
- Share positive results. Emphasize how you have changed or become a better person since the crime or through rehabilitation. Stress educational gains and job training credentials.

[237] Katuin, et al. (2010).

Reentry MythBusters[238]

FEDERAL BONDING PROGRAM (https://bonds4jobs.com)

MYTH: Businesses and employers have no way to protect themselves from potential property and monetary losses should an individual they hire prove to be dishonest.

FACT: Through the Federal Bonding Program, funded and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, fidelity insurance bonds are available to indemnify employers for loss of money or property sustained through the dishonest acts of their employees (i.e., theft, forgery, larceny, and embezzlement).

EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND CHECKS (https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/background-checks-what-employers-need-know)

MYTH: An employer can get a copy of your criminal history from companies that do background checks without your permission.

FACT: According to the Fair Credit Reporting Act, employers must receive a person's permission, usually in writing, before asking a background screening company to run a criminal history report for that person. If an applicant does not permit the background check, the potential employer may elect not to review his or her application for employment. If an applicant permits the background check and then is denied employment because of information in the report, the potential employer must follow several legal obligations to justify that denial. These obligations include providing applicants with the name, address, and telephone number of the company that supplied the criminal history report; advising them of their right to dispute the accuracy or completeness of any information in the report; and explaining that they have the right to request an additional free report from the same company.

WORK OPPORTUNITY TAX CREDIT (https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wotc)

MYTH: Employers are offered no federal income tax advantage by hiring an ex-felon.

FACT: Employers can save money on their federal income taxes through the Work Opportunity Tax Credit by hiring ex-felons.

Supporting Families and Children of Incarcerated Fathers

> "When a child's parent goes to prison, with rare exception, the child mourns. They may mourn the loss of the parent, the games they played with them, the meals they ate together or the stories that were read. Or, they may mourn the loss of the hope of the fantasy of what their parent might have been.... They need adults who will listen to them and who will truly understand the power of their feelings and honor the overall significance of the parent-child relationship in spite of the parents' crime." [239]

As noted earlier, children of incarcerated fathers tend to suffer from stress, trauma, and stigmatization; they may exhibit a broad variety of behavioral, emotional, and other problems;[240] and other family members are also subject to emotional, financial, and physical stress.[241] This can apply whether fathers had been living in the same household as their children or not. Children's feelings of loss and hopelessness can decrease their coping skills and increase or perpetuate the impact of trauma and stress.

[238] Council of State Governments' Justice Center, Federal Interagency Reentry Council. (2014). *Reentry mythbusters.* https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/REENTRY_MYTHBUSTERS.pdf

[239] Adalist-Estrin, A. (Presenter). (2017, January 25). *Supporting fathers and families impacted by incarceration* [Webinar]. https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/supporting-fathers-and-families-impacted-incarceration-nrfc-webinar

[240] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2008); LIS, Inc. (2002). *Services for families of prison inmates.* U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/017272.pdf

[241] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2008); La Vigne, N. G., Naser, R. L., Brooks, L. E., & Castro, J. L. (2005). Examining the effect of incarceration and in-prison family contact on prisoners' family relationships. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 21(4), 314-335.

Cumulative Stress of Parents' Criminal Justice System Involvement for Children[242]

Stage of Criminal Justice Involvement	Feelings and Stress Experienced by Children
Arrest	Fear, Confusion, Panic
Pre-Trial/Trial	Anxiety, Frustration
Sentencing	Hopelessness, Helplessness
Initial Incarceration	Abandonment, Stigma, Loyalty Conflict, Worry
Incarceration Stage Two	Resentment, Balance, Idealization
Pre-Release	Fear, Anxiety, Anticipation
Post-Release	Celebration, Ambivalence, Chaos

One way to counteract these impacts is to provide access to supportive and caring services in the community. Children need adults who will listen and help them to communicate about these feelings, but the adults who have been closest to the situation often need help themselves before they are able to provide that support. Helping caregivers find resources, supports, or coping strategies can increase their ability to parent effectively; bolster the presence of key protective factors in the family; enhance the sense of nurturing and attachment between parent and child; and have a positive impact on children's social and emotional competence. Complementing caregiver services with mentoring and support for children can further enhance the health and well-being of children and families.

Fatherhood programs may not be able to provide supportive services directly for children and families of incarcerated parents, but they can look for opportunities to connect with existing community services. They can also reach out to key members of a child's community (e.g., teachers, school counselors, clergy, health care providers, child welfare personnel) to ensure that these individuals are aware of and fully understand the needs of children of incarcerated parents.

The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (formerly the Family and Corrections Network) maintains a Directory of Programs Serving Children & Families of the Incarcerated and has a range of other resources relevant for work with the families of incarcerated fathers.

[242] Adalist-Estrin, A. (Presenter). (2017, January 25).

Spotlight on...

Programs Working with Incarcerated and Reentry Fathers

- PB&J Family Services in Albuquerque, NM, provides supportive services for parents in correctional facilities, children and caretakers within the community, and post-release support through home visiting, therapeutic bonding-attachment programs, weekly support groups, and a workforce development center. While fathers are in prison, they can participate in mentoring and parent-child visits. Support is provided to their elementary or middle school-aged children before and after visits through the *KidPACT* program. After release, fathers can participate in *Fathers Building Futures,* an economic development initiative that trains fathers in a business of their choice while providing affordable, meaningful, and useful services to the community. These businesses include auto detailing, custom woodworking, and mobile power washing and graffiti removal.
- Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind helps incarcerated parents and the caregivers of their children develop coparenting agreements; offers school-based services for children whose lives have been impacted by incarceration of a parent; and provides reunification and re-entry services for prisoners and their families.
- The New Hampshire Department of Corrections' Family Connections Centers provide parenting education and healthy relationship classes for incarcerated parents, a summer camp program for their children, and opportunities for healthy contact between the parents and their children through internet video visits and Family Fun Days.
- The Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program, operated by Seton Youth Shelters in Hampton Roads and Virginia Beach, VA, matches children with trained adult mentors. The mentors engage the children in recreational, educational, or cultural activities on a weekly basis.
- Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota partnered with the education division of the South Dakota Department of Corrections from 2006 to 2011 to work with fathers who were scheduled for release in six months or less. Program participants received relationship, parenting, and economic stability services. One innovative feature of the program gave fathers the opportunity to create video diaries of themselves doing something special for their children, such as reading a book, reading a letter, or playing a musical instrument. The DVDs were then mailed home to their children. Transitional support was also available for newly released fathers as they reentered the community.
- The Osborne Association in Brooklyn, NY, has worked with correctional facility administrators to establish children's centers at several New York state prisons. Graduates of their correctional facility-based parenting classes serve as informal mentors who are available to answer questions from other fathers or visiting children and to encourage positive parent-child interaction. Fathers and children participate together in 15- to 30-minute skill-building sessions that give fathers the opportunity to practice parenting skills, interact directly with their children, and receive feedback and parenting support from experienced fathers.
- Project D.A.D., a program of People for People, Inc. in Philadelphia, works with employers that have had high turnover to improve reliability. Although many of the program participants have criminal records, the preparation and ongoing support provided by Project D.A.D. enables employers to hire reliable workers and reduce turnover.
- Friends Outside in Los Angeles County (FOLA) has provided fatherhood reentry services since 2008. Fathers participate in curricula-driven parenting, relationship, and employment workshops and, after graduation, job specialists provide access to vocational training and employment.

- Since 2005, the Texas Offenders Reentry Initiative (T.O.R.I.), operated by Metroplex Economic Development Corporation, has served over 10,000 formerly incarcerated individuals across Texas. Support services focus on key reentry issues such as housing, employment, family reunification, parenting, education, and healthcare.

- During a federally funded project from 2006 to 2011, the Exchange Club Center Center for Child Abuse Services, Treatment, and Life Enrichment (CASTLE) in St. Lucie County, FL, provided a "harvest" outreach program to fathers upon their release from prison. The program provided vouchers and other services to fill a gap while former inmates waited to receive food stamps or other benefits. The program also included a support group to help children of incarcerated dads deal with separation, divorce, and reunification issues, and a mothers' support group that met regularly before fathers were released from prison to focus on positive parenting and reunification. Staff stayed in contact with fathers and family members for up to 1 year after they completed the program.[243]

- Connections to Success provides services for ex-offenders in St. Louis, MO, St. Charles, MO, Kansas City, MO, and Kansas City, KS. Along with subsidized employment and on-the-job training, Connections to Success involves fathers in transitional job training that combines skills-building with employment. The program identifies skill gaps across industries and has focused training on home remodeling, manufacturing, and general maintenance. The program stresses the benefits its services bring to employers, such as providing a qualified pool of talent, pre-screening applicants according to employer's specifications, reducing turnover cost, and providing follow-up assistance for at least a year.

- The RIDGE Project works in prisons across Ohio through an 18-week TYRO program, formerly known as *Keeping FAITH (Families and Inmates Together in Harmony)*, that involves both the incarcerated fathers and their partners. The first 10 weeks of TYRO focus on intensive work with the dads to teach them to take responsibility for their actions, show them how to overcome the obstacles of their incarceration, and prepare them for the transition back into their homes and communities. Upon successfully completing the program, a father earns the title of TYRO, which means warrior or someone learning something new. This is followed by a 4-week couples class that focuses on communication skills for fathers and their partners. The final 4 weeks of the program feature an advanced communication class in which the couples learn about conflict resolution, anger management, and relationship stability.

> *"I have now been working full-time for over 6 months and my supervisor loves my work! In fact, they have since hired several additional TYRO graduates because they have been so pleased with my attitude, character, and work ethic. I have 'set the bar' on what my boss expects from a TYRO and I have continued to encourage these TYRO men as well." (Graduate of the RIDGE Project's Keeping Faith program)* [244]

[243] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. (2009). *How to implement promising practices: Peer guidance from the Responsible Fatherhood Program.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[244] The RIDGE Project. (2014, Spring). Tyro spotlight. *Tyro Times*, 6(6), 6. http://storage.cloversites.com/theridgeproject/documents/TYROTimesSpring2014.pdf

Top Takeaways

- Community-based programs must understand the culture and context of correctional facilities and present documented outcomes of working with incarcerated fathers to show the benefits of fatherhood programs.
- Fatherhood practitioners should anticipate various challenges to providing services in a correctional environment. Working closely with corrections staff can help anticipate potential problems and develop alternative approaches. For instance, if an inmate is scheduled for early release before completing a fatherhood program, it may be possible to assign him additional individual work or help him connect with a program in his community after release, so he can continue to progress toward fatherhood program goals.
- Practitioners working with incarcerated dads must be unflappable, adaptable, patient, and firm, yet approachable.
- Assistance with child support, education, and job training can help prepare dads for reentry.
- When fathers have multiple children with multiple partners, focusing on one child and one mother and then gradually broadening to more children can be effective. Some programs allow the father to identify the partner/coparent and child(ren) who they would like to have visit or participate alongside them in the program.
- Successful strategies for father-child interaction include working with dads to write letters to their children on a regular basis, create books or handkerchief art for their children, and read a book to their child either over the phone or via audio or video recording. Programs can also work with corrections agencies to reduce the barriers to communication and contact, such as allowing free or reduced phone calls, providing child-friendly visit centers, and helping coparents with visitation expenses and logistics.
- Show fathers the value in developing a working relationship with their child's mother, and provide them with skills to improve this relationship. Also, look to provide relationship skills classes for couples and link fathers to community services upon release.
- When possible, provide or connect with community support services for children, mothers, coparents, and other family members before and following the father's release. Reach out to key members of a child's community (e.g., teachers, school counselors, clergy, health care providers, child welfare personnel) to ensure that these individuals are aware of and fully understand the needs of children of incarcerated parents.
- Develop relationships with local employers to help reentry dads with employment opportunities. Counsel men to be upfront with potential employers about their criminal record.
- Provide wrap-around services to fully support participants before and after they are hired. This can involve developing and implementing an employment plan, providing support to overcome barriers such as transportation and housing, and following up to evaluate participants' success at the job over time.

Helpful Resources

Resources for Incarcerated Fathers

- These two tip sheets can be provided directly to fathers or used as handouts in one-to-one or group sessions to reinforce key points:
  - Tips from a Father in Prison (2002) was written by Michael Carlin for the Incarcerated Fathers Library, which is now housed at the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated.
  - Tips for Dads: Reconnecting with Your Kids after a Long Absence (2008) was developed by Fernando Mederos for the Fatherhood Initiative at the Massachusetts Department for Children and Families.
- *Parenting From Prison: A Resource Guide for Parents Incarcerated in Colorado,* which was edited by Barbara Bosley, Christie Donner, Carolyn McLean, and Ellen Toomey-Hale (2002), contains useful ideas and information for all incarcerated parents.

Resources for Practitioners and Families

- Every Second: The Impact of the Incarceration Crisis on America's Families (2018). A summary of research detailing the impact on the families of people who are incarcerated, by Brian Elderbroom, Laura Bennett, Shanna Gong, Felicity Rose, & Zoë Towns of FWD.us.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) provides various reports on Incarceration and Reentry, including:
  - The Implementation of Family Strengthening Programs for Families Affected by Incarceration (2015)
  - Five Years Later: Final Implementation Lessons from the Evaluation of Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and Their Partners (2013)
  - Parenting from Prison: Innovative Programs to Support Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers (2010).
  - Working with Incarcerated and Released Parents: Lessons from OCSE Grants and State Programs (2006).
  - Strengthening the Couple and Family Relationships of Fathers Behind Bars: The Promise and Perils of Corrections-Based Programming (August 2009).
  - Incarceration and the Family: A Review of Research and Promising Approaches for Serving Fathers and Families (September 2008).
- Parents Behind Bars: What Happens to Their Children? (October 2015), David Murphey and P. Mae Cooper, Child Trends.
- The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (formerly the Family and Corrections Network) has a wide range of resources pertaining to incarcerated parents and their families, including:
  - Children of Incarcerated Parents Library (free downloadable pamphlets for parents, caregivers, and professionals — in English and Spanish).
  - Books for parents, caregivers, and professionals to read with children of the incarcerated.
  - Homecoming: Children's Adjustment to Parent's Parole (2003), Ann Adalist-Estrin.
  - Parental Incarceration and Child Wellbeing: An Annotated Bibliography (2014), Christopher Wildeman.

- The RIDGE Project publishes ***TYRO Times***, a quarterly newsletter distributed to correctional institutions throughout Ohio, to inform correctional staff and inmates and encourage new participants to join sessions offered by the program.
- ***Prisoners and Families: Parenting Issues During Incarceration*** (December 2001) by Creasie Finney Hairston was part of the **"From Prison to Home" project**, which commissioned papers and hosted a national policy conference to support research on the effect of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and communities.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation published ***Balancing Justice with Mercy: An Interfaith Guide for Creating Healing Communities*** (2008), a detailed practice guide offering tips and ideas to help faith-based organizations become "healing communities" and "stations of hope" for men and women returning from or at risk of incarceration.
- **The National Reentry Resource Center** provides information for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers.
- The Urban Institute has a library of resources, including **Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jails: Reducing Barriers to Family Connections**

Resources for Reentry

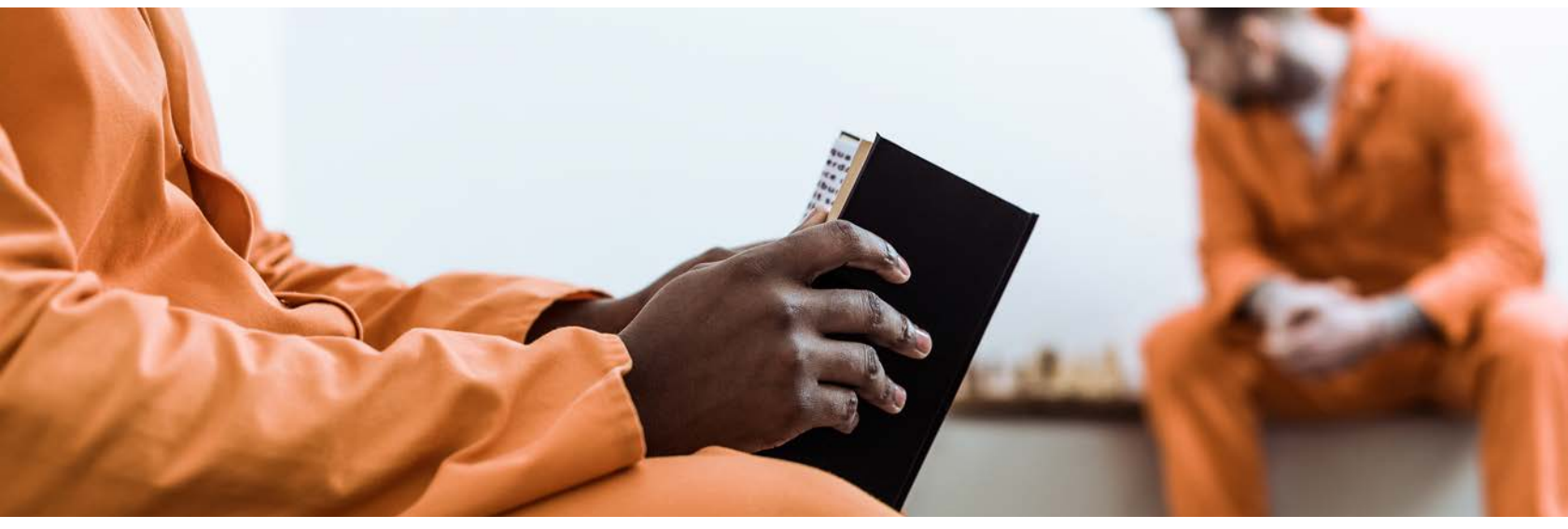
- The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse has provided several webinars on incarceration and reentry, including:
  - **Working with Fathers after Incarceration** (2019)
  - **Supporting Fathers and Families Impacted by Incarceration** (2017)
  - **Effective Strategies for working with Fathers Returning from Prison** (2012)
- The Urban Institute has several reports on this topic, including:
  - **Responsible Fatherhood Reentry Projects** (with links to various reports 2015-2017)
  - **Families and Reentry: Unpacking How Social Support Matters** (2012).
  - **Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry** (2006).
- The National Fatherhood Initiative offers ***Engaging Fathers for Successful Reentry: Research, Tips, Best Practices,*** a selection of fact sheets with ideas for dealing with eight major reentry challenges: housing, employment, marriage and relationships, substance abuse, mentoring and community support, child support, involving moms, and domestic violence.
- ***The Front Line: Building Programs that Recognize Families' Role in Reentry***, by Mike Bobbitt and Marta Nelson (2004), is part of the Vera Institute of Justice's Issues in Brief series, which looks at Project Greenlight and other innovations across the nation to explore how family involvement in reentry may lead to more successful transitions from prison and better recidivism results.
- The Federal Interagency Reentry Council's ***Reentry MythBusters*** fact sheets are designed to clarify existing federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families in areas such as public housing, child support, access to benefits, parental rights, employer incentives, and Medicaid.
- The **Federal Bonding Program,** established in 1966 by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides Fidelity Bonds that guarantee honesty for at-risk, hard-to-place job seekers. The bonds cover the first 6 months of employment at no cost to the job applicant or the employer. In most states, the bonds are made available through the state agency responsible for workforce matters.

- The **Work Opportunity Tax Credit** provides $1,200 to $9,600 in tax credits for employers who hire economically disadvantaged individuals who have been convicted of a felony and were either convicted or released from prison within a year of hire.
- ***Forget "ban the box" and give ex-prisoners employability certificates***. An op-ed from the Brookings Institute (December 5, 2016) with information on new research about the use of employability certificates provided by local courts.

Curricula

For more information on these and other curricula, see **NRFC's Compendium of Curricula Used by Fatherhood Programs.**

- *InsideOut Dad,*® from the **National Fatherhood Initiative,** is designed to help incarcerated fathers successfully reintegrate back into their families. The following two activities come from this curriculum:
  - *Fathering from the Inside* – A 60-minute activity that helps fathers create a fathering plan so they can be more involved, responsible, and committed fathers while incarcerated.
  - *Love and Relationships* – A 60-minute activity that focuses on increasing dads' awareness of factors associated with positive relationships.
- ***Fathers in Prison: Parent Education Resource Manual***, by Patricia W. Lockett and Creasie Finney Hairston (1991), is a trainer's manual providing instructions for presenting a parent education course for fathers in prison.
- **TYRO Dads,** a marriage and fatherhood program designed for incarcerated and recently released fathers, was developed by Ron and Catherine Tijerina of the RIDGE Project with contributions from Charles Lee-Johnson.
- The ***Parenting Inside Out®*** program is a parenting skills training program developed for criminal justice involved parents, with a community version appropriate for fathers on parole or probation.
- ***Moral Reconation Therapy***, developed by Gregory Little and Kenneth Robinson (1985), is a cognitive-behavioral program for substance abuse treatment and for criminal justice offenders that has proven to reduce rates of recidivism for periods as long as 20 years after treatment.



Activities

A solid organization and effective facilitators are critical to a successful fatherhood program. Similarly, the activities that prompt and guide group discussion can have an important impact on the success of program participants. Used effectively, group and one-to-one activities can motivate fathers and help them overcome barriers they once might have thought were insurmountable.

While all the activities detailed here can be used in one-to-one settings, they can also be used in group sessions where fathers can interact and share ideas and experiences. All the activities are designed for use with any dad participating in a responsible fatherhood program.

The activities can be downloaded from https://www.fatherhood.gov/for-programs/program-activities

Reflection and Awareness

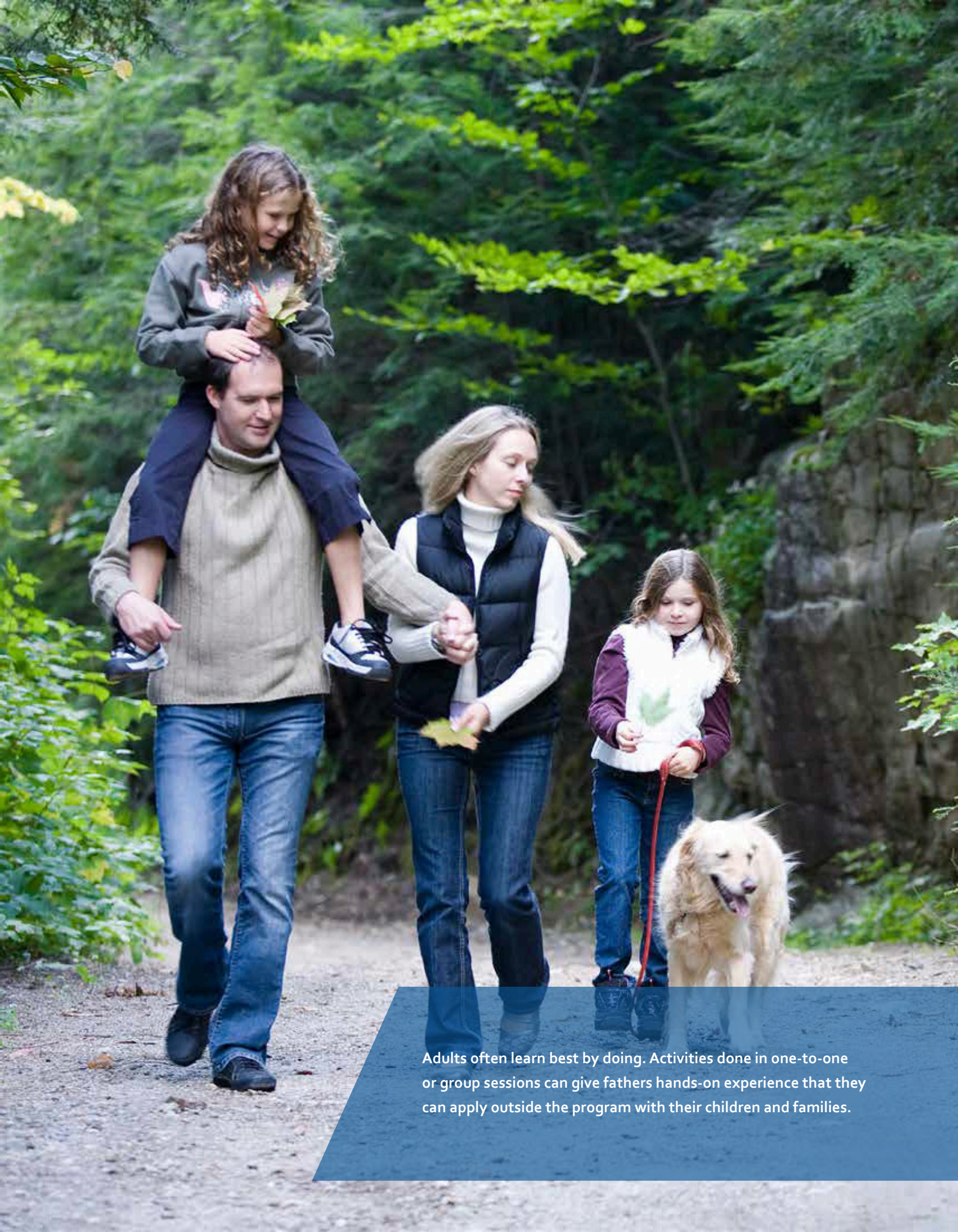
Effective fatherhood programs help fathers reflect on their life experiences and increase their awareness of the impact of these experiences on their current situation, parenting style, and relationship skills. Breakthrough moments can occur when fathers commit to being a better father, doing better than their dad, or improving their relationship with their child's mother. Most fatherhood and relationship curricula incorporate activities that can be used to encourage such reflection and discussion.

What's It Been Like? or Manhood Collage from **The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum: A Curriculum Developed for the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration**

Participants in these activities reflect on and discuss their past and current experiences as sons, men, and fathers. Fatherhood practitioners can use these activities to engage fathers in reflection as they guide them on a journey of self-awareness and growth as men and fathers.

From **Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers:**

- **Values Voting**
  Can be used as a 20-minute icebreaker or a 40-minute program activity. Participants choose to agree or disagree with controversial statements and then defend their positions. In the full activity, participants are encouraged to explore their personal values and reflect on their position as a role model for their children. If used as an icebreaker, the statements can be adapted to encourage interaction and sharing.
- **Trust Walk**
  Can be used as a short warm-up or a longer program focused on the needs of small children. Group participants assume the role of "child" or "parent." Those in the child role are blindfolded and led through an obstacle course by parents who are given instructions on how to interact with their child. The activity reminds participants of the feelings of dependence among children and the responsibilities facing parents. Participants are encouraged to reflect and discuss parenting techniques.
- **The Values Auction**
  In this 30–45 minute activity, men identify the values, behaviors, and characteristics they want to nurture in their children by bidding in an "auction" of attributes that they value in children.



Adults often learn best by doing. Activities done in one-to-one or group sessions can give fathers hands-on experience that they can apply outside the program with their children and families.

From **The Nurturing Fathers Program:**

- **Male Nurturance**
  A two-part, 45-minute activity designed to help fathers define and identify the difference between nurturing and non-nurturing parenting practices.

- **Fathering Without Fear or Violence**
  A 45-minute series of three activities explores the difference between nurturing and non-nurturing fathering practices, helps fathers identify the intentions and outcomes of various fathering practices, and encourages men to commit to specific nurturing fathering practices that do not represent fear or violence.

From **Quenching the Father Thirst: Developing a Dad** by the National Center for Fathering:

- **The Mask of Masculinity versus a Real Man**
  Short activity designed to show what real manhood is not and to explore the qualities of a real man.
- **My Father Is Like A _____** and **Like Father, Like Son**
  Two short activities that challenge dads to think about their relationship with their own father and its impact on them as fathers themselves.

Parenting Skills

Most fatherhood curricula feature activities to help fathers focus on and improve their parenting skills. Several general parenting curricula also incorporate activities that can be used in fatherhood programs, although few are specifically designed for fathers. The following activities were designed specifically for group or one-to-one work with fathers.

Understanding Children's Ages and Stages from Pamela Wilson

A 45-minute activity that involves teams of fathers competing to answer questions about child development. Designed to increase or reinforce participants' knowledge of child development from birth through adolescence.

From **Dealing With Children's Behaviors in The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum: A Curriculum Developed for the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration:**

Three activities that help fathers examine the difference between punishment and discipline and think about ways to discipline children in constructive, age-appropriate ways:

- **Looking Back, Looking Ahead**
  A 25–30 minute activity to help participants identify how they were disciplined as children, examine how those experiences affect their parenting style today, and begin a conversation about effective alternatives to hitting as a means of correcting children's behavior.
- **Punishment or Discipline?**
  A 20–30 minute activity to clarify, define, and foster understanding of the terms discipline and punishment and help fathers understand the meaning of abuse.
- **What Do You Do?**
  A 40-minute activity with role-play situations can help fathers identify constructive and age-appropriate ways to deal with their children's behavior. Features a handout for fathers called Age Makes a Difference that presents four basic guidelines for fathers to keep in mind as they discipline their children. It also provides age-specific hints for parents and includes "a word about spanking."

Reading With Your Child

This activity from **Focus on Fathering** helps fathers understand the important role that reading plays in children's language development and later school success.

Communication Skills

The following activities are designed to help fathers enhance their communication and relationship skills.

Active Listening

A 35-minute activity from **Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers** divides participants into pairs. A "speaker" discusses a problem with a "listener" who secretly was instructed to listen poorly. Group members then assess aspects of poor and good listening, and practice using effective listening skills in a role play.

Showing and Handling Feelings

This three-part activity from **24/7 Dad™** (curriculum available from National Fatherhood Initiative) takes about 100 minutes and helps fathers increase their awareness, knowledge, and capacity for showing and handling feelings and emotions. The final part of the activity focuses on showing and handling grief and loss.

Listening/Drawing

A short activity from **Quenching the Father Thirst: Developing a Dad** by the National Center for Fathering can help dads understand the complexity of communication.

One-to-One Activities

The following activities can be used in one-to-one work during home visits or in-office sessions. They also can be adapted for group work.

The Modern Dad's Quiz: How Well Do You Know Your Children?

This quiz from **The Modern Dad's Dilemma: How to Stay Connected With Your Kids in a Rapidly Changing World** can be completed by fathers on their own or with a fatherhood practitioner. Its goal is to show fathers how much they know about their children and encourage them to learn more if they don't know all the answers.

Meeting Baby's Basic Needs (Baby's Cycle of Care) and Five Keys to Being an Involved Father

Originally developed for fathers in prenatal classes, these handouts from **Conscious Fathering** are also useful in one-to-one work to help fathers understand the needs of babies and ways they can be an involved father.

From **Maps for Dads: Welcome to Dadhood and Doin' the Dad Thing:**

Most fatherhood curricula feature activities to help fathers focus on and improve their parenting skills. Several general parenting curricula also incorporate activities that can be used in fatherhood programs, although few are specifically designed for fathers. The following activities were designed specifically for group or one-to-one work with fathers.

- **Just the Facts Jack**
  A two-page handout with illustrations and layman's language that emphasizes the basic facts about the importance of father involvement in a child's life.
- **Bonding with Your Baby**
  Ideas that dads can use to bond with their infants and babies.
- **Crying**
  Tips dads can use to respond to their crying babies.

CHEEERS

The Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo staff use the CHEEERS assessment to structure conversations with dads about positive father-child interaction while reinforcing positive behaviors and assessing them over time. CHEEERS gets its name from father-child interaction: how a father responds to the baby's Cues; the quality and frequency of Holding; what Expressions he uses; how much Empathy a dad shows for his baby's feelings and needs; the extent to which a dad promotes an Environment that supports the baby's growth and development; whether there is a smooth Rhythm to father-child interaction; and how much dad Smiles at his baby.

Tips for Dads

Developed and adapted from various sources by Fernando Mederos of the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, these four tip sheets can be used as handouts in one-to-one or group sessions to reinforce key points:

- **Tips for Dads: Playing with Children**
- **Tips for Fathers: Disciplining Children**
- **Tips for Dads: It's a Matter of Pride, Being a Good Role Model**
- **Sixteen Things Fathers Can Do to Support Their Pregnant Partners**